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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

PREPARING ABORIGINAL LEARNERS FOR SOCIAL WORK: SOCIAL CHANGE OR SOCIAL CONTROL?

BY

DAVID JAMES HANNIS ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

Edmonton, Alberta

FALL, 1995

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When they took away the buffalo, they took away food, shelter, clothing, religion - everything that we needed. But now there is a new buffalo, and that is education.

Kathleen Foreman (1987).

Education gives hope and an eventual release from the dismal dowry of most First Nations women.

Linda McDonald (1989).

Native education has been a trap for us, a camouflaged plastic jungle into which we have walked and from which we must now find our way.

Cora Weber Pillwax (1992).

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled PREPARING ABORIGINAL ADULT LEARNERS FOR SOCIAL WORK: SOCIAL CHANGE OR SOCIAL CONTROL? submitted by DAVID JAMES HANNIS in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION IN ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION.

Marilyn Assheton-Smith
Marilyn Assheton-Smith, Supervisor

Toh Swee-Hin

Tracey Derwing
Tracey Derwing

Date: September 19, 1995

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all those great teachers
who have believed in me,
those students and colleagues
who have respected and trusted me,
my wife Carol,
who has supported me,
and my two social activist daughters
Katherine and Kristina,
who I hope will continue
to be empowered by their educational experiences.

ABSTRACT

Formal education has the potential to both liberate and oppress. An oppressive education teaches students to dutifully learn and faithfully reproduce the non-negotiable truths of others and can leave students with an enduring sense of inferiority. Emancipatory learning, on the other hand, recognises and respects the knowledge students bring to the classroom and builds upon it, to help learners develop new insights and capacities to think critically.

The education many Native students have been exposed to in the past has often been oppressive. However, with the recent trend for Aboriginal communities to take more control of their schools, and for more Native adult learners to attend colleges and universities, the potential now exists for First Nations people to experience a more liberating education. The reverse may also be true; such expanded educational opportunities hold the potential to accelerate the pace of assimilation into mainstream society, and the price an Aboriginal student might pay for a credential from a non-Native post secondary institution could be a greater sense of cultural confusion and a weakened sense of identification as a Native person.

This qualitative research reviewed the individual experiences of twelve Aboriginal adult learners, mainly women, who had recently graduated from a community college social work program, and examined the impact that education had had upon them.

The most significant research finding was that despite having been taught mainly by non-Native instructors who pursued curricula that had largely been unadapted, these graduates emerged from this program with more self-confidence,

a greater understanding of Native issues, and a stronger sense of themselves as Aboriginal people. This finding suggests that these graduates will have an enhanced capacity to resist the forces of assimilation in the future and will also serve as role models for other Native people who might have been fearful of attending a Canadian postsecondary institution in the past.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT AND DEFINING THE QUESTION 1

Introduction 1

History of Native Education in Canada to 1969 9

Colonialism and Education 17

Developments in Native Education Over the Past Twenty-five Years 19

Defining the Research Question 21

CHAPTER 2 - THE RESEARCH PROCESS 24

Background 24

Ethical Considerations 27

The Pilot Interview 29

The Focus Group 31

The Individual Interviews 36

The Individual Essays 37

Rationale for Selecting the Research Method 37

CHAPTER 3 - BREAKING THROUGH INVISIBLE WALLS: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION 42

Specific Educational Barriers Faced by Study Participants 45

Participants' Previous Educational Experiences 54

The Degree of Cultural Attachment Among Participants 58

Conclusion 60

CHAPTER 4 - ASSIMILATION OR LIBERATION? THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS....62

Introduction....62

Personal Empowerment....62

Impact of the Program on Family Relationships....67

Impact of the Program on the Sense of Native Identity and Level of Cultural Awareness....69

Participants' Observations on Instructors....72

Participants' Understanding of the Role of Social Workers....74

Summary of Findings....76

CHAPTER 5 - THE RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS....78

Examining the Research Context....78

Analysing the Research Findings....83

Conclusion....96

BIBLIOGRAPHY....99

APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM....107

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE PILOT INTERVIEW....109

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS TO THE FOCUS GROUP AND PARTICIPANTS....110

APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONS ASKED TO THE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS DURING THE SECOND INTERVIEW....111

APPENDIX 5: PERSONAL ESSAY QUESTIONS....112

INFORMED CONSENT FORM....113

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 - DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS....................................30

CHAPTER 1 - ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT AND DEFINING THE QUESTION

INTRODUCTION

Recent decisions by universities and colleges across Canada, including the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton, to improve access to programs for Native people mark a watershed in the history of Native education.

Until relatively recently, Aboriginal people have largely been excluded from postsecondary education, and given the potential for formal education to both liberate and oppress (Freire, 1973), such exclusion might have had the perhaps unintentional consequence of ensuring that Native culture remained strong. However, since some correlation exists between the number of years of formal schooling and personal income levels, and between successful completion of a college/university education and participation in the paid labour force (Assheton-Smith, 1988), the relatively few numbers of Native people completing high school and university/college courses partially explains why Aboriginal people in Canada are over-represented amongst the poor. At the same time, despite the pernicious influence of the Residential Schools on Native people, the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the education systems defined and managed by mainstream society, has helped guard against the complete assimilation of many First Nations people. Some Aboriginal people may have grown up not fully understanding their culture and feeling ashamed of belonging to a stigmatised group, but at least they knew they were Native.

The potential for formal education systems to perpetuate inequalities based on class, gender, race, and/or ethnicity has been well documented (Altbach, 1978; Apple, 1979; Belenky, 1986; Bourdieu and Passerson, 1977; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Carnoy, 1974, 1990; Freire 1973, 1981, 1985; Gilligan 1982; Giroux, 1983; Gramsci, 1973; Illich, 1971; Roberts, 1982; Smith, 1990). Essentially the arguments have been that the knowledge and truths that are deemed by professional educators to have most legitimacy usually only reflect a culture and world view of one dominant segment of society, namely white, middle-class, western males. Students who do not fall into this category are at a disadvantage when negotiating formal education systems and the price of success for them is often to commit "cultural suicide" (Brookfield, 1990), or to feel devalued as a student.

Given these concerns, any expansion of educational opportunities for Aboriginal people by non-Native institutions must inevitably raise the question of whose interests are being served by such initiatives. Do these developments, perhaps unintentionally, represent an attempt to achieve total assimilation of Native people "through the back door?" This is the central question pursued in this study.

Several writers (Barman, Hebert, and McCaskill, 1987; Bashford and Heinzerling, 1987; Carney, 1982; Dickason, 1993; Hodgson, 1992; Longboat, 1987; Mercredi and Turpel, 1993; Ponting and Gibbins, 1980), have suggested that federal government policies towards Native people up to the early 1970's were crudely and explicitly assimilationist in intent, with formal education systems, and in particular the Residential Schools, playing crucial roles in ensuring the success of such policies. The publication of the 1969 federal White Paper which proposed the repeal of the Indian Act was perceived by many Native leaders as a final effort to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society, and it was met by spirited resistance and a rare display of unity by Native leaders. However, this clumsy federal initiative did provoke the beginning of critical discussions among Aboriginal people about what a distinctly Native education should look like. Unfortunately, according to Roberts (1982), these discussions were conducted at a fairly esoteric level throughout most of the ensuing decade, with Aboriginal leaders generally rarely being successful at challenging the epistomologies of those highly credentialled non-Native experts who were planning their educational system for them. Roberts has attributed this inability by Aboriginal people to exert more control over their education partly to a timidity stemming from a lack of experience with developing curricula, and partly to a general reluctance to challenge the authority of non-Native professionals and the institutions that employ them. Other explanations of this unwillingness to challenge the assumptions and knowledge of non-Native experts include cultural differences, the impact of colonialism, and a general reluctance to antagonise funders. In some Native cultures it is inappropriate to challenge the wisdom of others, and hence to question too vigorously the actions and truths of experts. In addition, being victims of colonialism for so long has imbued many Native people with a sense of inferiority and an unwillingness to be assertive.

Even where attempts have been made to adapt curricula to make them more culturally relevant there has sometimes been resistance from Native people themselves, fearing that such changes would lead to a "watered-down" program and a second rate credential that would restrict mobility in employment markets and between educational institutions.

Since 1969, and particularly since the National Indian Brotherhood's landmark policy statement: "Indian Control of Indian Education" (1972), impressive strides have been made to increase access to education for Native people at both the secondary and college/university levels. The percentage of Native youth dropping out of high school has slowly declined from a figure typically in excess of 90% during the 1970's; increasing numbers of Native adults have been returning to school for upgrading; and the number of Aboriginal people graduating from colleges and universities in Canada increased threefold between 1981 and 1991 (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1991), and has continued to increase since then. These changes can partly be explained by the growing assertiveness of Native people; changes in government policies; and a greater willingness of colleges and universities to be more responsive to Aboriginal learners. The shift in government thinking in the 1960's and 1970's might initially have been related to a concern that Native organisations would adopt the radical tactics preferred by some US Indian organisations at that time (Dickason,1993), but more recently such shifts have probably been driven by pragmatic economic and humanitarian considerations. For instance, the costs to the federal government associated with high rates of unemployment, incarceration, social problems, and ill health amongst Native people have been considerable.

Demographic trends have also been relevant to policy shifts aimed at improving access to formal education systems for Native people. While the nation's overall workforce has been steadily aging, continuing relatively high birth rates in Native communities has resulted in a higher percentage of young people in those communities than in Canada as a whole, suggesting that this population may be able to contribute to possible labour force shortages in the future.

Related to these trends has been the steady increase in the numbers of Aboriginal people taking up residence in urban centres, forcing municipal education authorities to address such issues as cultural relevance in curricula. In Canada as a whole, the percentage of Treaty Indians living off reserves doubled between 1966 and 1983, from 15% to 30% (Angus, 1991), and has continued to grow since then.

Despite these recent changes in educational opportunities for Native people, their impact should not be exaggerated. Most Aboriginal people do not complete high school, and the chance of obtaining a degree or college diploma remains a remote possibility for the majority of First Nations people in Canada. There continue to be too few successful role models to inspire young Native people to continue at school, while decisions about postsecondary admission requirements, curricula, and pedagogies remain, for the most part, firmly in the hands of non-Native educators, guided by their own culturally-bound epistomologies. This raises the inevitable question of whether or not these recent educational developments for Aboriginal people, in fact, perpetuate dependencies and feelings of inferiority and by so doing, continue to facilitate the process of assimilation into mainstream society.

Related to this central concern is the possibility that expanded educational opportunities for Native people may accelerate the pace of cultural genocide for First Nations people. Firstly, even if the Native graduates of more accessible college and university programs have been empowered by their new educational experience and emerge with a stronger and healthier sense of themselves as Native persons, are they prepared to apply their learning for the betterment of other Aboriginal people? And secondly, even if these new graduates do have a stronger commitment to social action, given the constraints of the workplace, and in particular, the bureaucratised structures that many of them will work in, will they be able to initiate meaningful change after they graduate?

Freire (1973) has observed from his own work among disempowered groups that people who have themselves experienced oppression in the past will sometimes oppress others if they eventually find themselves in positions of power. Other writers (Alinsky 1946, Carniol 1990, Galper 1975, Illich 1977, McKnight 1977) have expressed pessimism about the ability of professional helpers, including social workers, to be able to effect meaningful change for their clients, even when they want to. Essentially, the argument advanced by these writers has been that the education many adult learners receive at colleges and universities produces conservative professionals who are more likely to become "agents of social control" rather than "agents of social change".

The notion of social workers as oppressors is captured in the following quote by Alinsky (1946):

> (social workers) come to the people of the slums under the aegis of benevolence and goodness, not to organise the people, not to help them rebel and fight their way out of the muck - NO! They come to get these people "adjusted"; adjusted so they will live in hell and like it too. (p.82)

Galper (1975) has echoed a similar theme and has argued that social workers are more concerned with regulating client behaviour than with meeting the needs of the poor who are typically preoccupied with getting enough to eat rather than with receiving counselling. He has also suggested that the way social workers practice their skills is controlled by the bureaucracies that employ them, and that constraints exist to ensure that even those social workers who are tempted to do so do not deviate from acceptable standards of practice.

Carniol (1990) has noted that social work schools in Canada are essentially conservative institutions whose primary task is to produce graduates who will fit well into the oppressive institutions that will employ them, while McKnight (1977), has been critical of social workers' apparent preoccupation with the deficiencies of clients, rather than with nurturing their inherent strengths.

Illich (1977) has further argued that professions are essentially self-serving, even when they profess to serve others: "a profession, like a priesthood, holds power by concession from an elite whose interests it props up" (p.27).

Further criticism of social workers comes from Collier (1993) who has suggested that in rural areas of Canada these professional helpers are "the shock troops of the army of occupation" (p. 44) who are also in charge of mop-up operations and the propaganda machine.

These perceptions of social work suggest that the odds are against any college or university trained Aboriginal social worker being able to be an effective change agent at either personal or societal levels. Jordan (1979) has argued that such change is however, more likely to occur with individual clients when social workers act with a high degree of authenticity and creativity, and refrain from applying a predetermined theoretical framework or technical process to clients.

The degree to which Aboriginal social workers can make a significant contribution towards improving the quality of life for other Native people may, in part, be determined by the kind of educational experience they themselves have had. The more they have been helped to become self-aware and self-confident and to see professional helping not merely as the application of isolated techniques, but the use of the full force of their unique personalities and cultural traits, the more likely they will be effective in creating meaningful change. This contention in turn, raises questions both about the curricula followed and the teaching strategies employed in the classroom.

In this research an attempt has been made to address the issue of "disguised" assimilation and to consider whether or not recent graduates of a community college social work program were in fact, empowered by that experience, to the point that they would be able to effectively initiate meaningful change in the lives of other Native people in the future. Or, alternatively, did the process of obtaining a professional credential for them merely accelerate the process of abandoning their Aboriginal culture?

Participants in this research were Aboriginal people in an all-Native program taught mainly by non-Native instructors. The curriculum had been largely determined by these instructors themselves, with little input from Native people. Few, if any, of the instructors had received formal training in teaching adults, although all had Master's degrees in social work, supplemented by considerable practice experience. As a result, most of these instructors would not have been formally introduced to the concepts of "transformative" learning and "emancipatory" education advanced by Mezirow (1977, 1981, 1990), and others, although if they had they would probably have been in sympathy with them.

Essentially, Mezirow has argued that the primary purpose of education is to encourage critical self-reflection and a questioning of the assumptions and values that form the basis of the way students see the world (Cranton 1992). This philosophy fits comfortably with the Code of Ethics of the Alberta Association of Social Workers which all the instructors in this program were required to subscribe to (Alberta Association of Social Workers, c1975), which stresses the importance of respecting the intrinsic worth of others and acting to effect social change for the overall benefit of humanity. In addition, it was clear from the written contributions that some of these same instructors made to a book about teaching social work to Native people that many of them were familiar with Paulo Freire's (1973, 1981) concept of "liberating" education and were attempting to practice it (Feehan and Hannis, 1993).

HISTORY OF NATIVE EDUCATION IN CANADA TO 1969.

Prior to contact with Europeans, Canada's Aboriginal people had full control over their education. The primary purpose of education within those Native communities was to equip people with the skills to cope with the exigencies of daily living and to facilitate an understanding of the culture they had been born into. While Aboriginal people were far from being an homogeneous group, there were certain similarities between their cultures and their approach to learning. Most knowledge was transmitted orally within a community context, and emphasis was often placed on skills mastery through experiential pedagogies. Functional roles were clearly circumscribed, with many tasks being allocated according to gender. The wisdom of Elders was honored, harmony with nature was valued, spirituality was respected, and there was frequently an emphasis within Native communities on mutuality and collaboration, placing the needs of the group above those of the individual, and dealing with the realities of the present rather than preparing for and speculating about uncertain futures.

Education, under these conditions, was inextricably linked to culture, and community values were expressed through the knowledge that was passed down from one generation to another, and through the customs, practices, and rituals that supported and reinforced these values.

The first Europeans to arrive in Canada were either entrepreneurs who sought furs, through trapping or by trading with Natives, or were missionaries bent on spreading their God's word and civilising the "savages." Whatever their explicit motivations for coming to Canada, both these groups of newcomers needed each other, and they arrived with similar elitist, ethnocentrist, colonial views. However, at least from the outset, there was also some recognition, particularly among some of the first missionaries, that Native people had a knowledge about living in Canada's harsh climate that could be useful. (Dickason, 1993). As the number of Europeans coming to Canada increased it was inevitable that conflict would occur between the newcomers and Native people, particularly over the ownership and use of land, and in 1763 the British authorities in the form of a Royal Proclamation, recognised, albeit in a rather vague way, that Native people had certain rights to "Hunting Grounds" (Asch,1988).

The passing of the British North America Act (BNA) in 1867 began the process of formalising the relationship between Britain and Canada, between the federal government and the provinces, and between Ottawa and Aboriginal people. The BNA Act acknowledged that meeting the needs of Native people was clearly a federal responsibility, and in 1869 Ottawa introduced a policy that recognised some Aboriginal land rights with respect to the territory that had been transferred to Canada from the Hudson's Bay Company. Under this latter initiative, the right of Native people to receive fair compensation for any of those lands that were required for settlement by Europeans was recognised (Asch, 1988). Over the next few years the federal government engaged in a number of activities that began to clarify its relationship to Canada's indigenous peoples, including the signing of various treaties which confirmed certain rights for "Treaty Indians", including the right to an education. The passing of the Indian Act in 1871, which specifically ensured the development of a legislative and policy framework which was to apply only to "Indians" and not to Inuit or Metis peoples, established an operational framework that basically remains in place today, despite some subsequent revisions to the Act.

From the discussions that took place at the time it was clear that these arrangements were perceived by Canada's political leadership as interim measures, pending the full assimilation of Aboriginal people into mainstream Canadian society. This perception is reflected in a statement by Canada's Prime Minister in 1887, John A. MacDonald, who declared that:

> the great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion, as speedily as they are fit to change. (Dickason, 1993, p.257)

According to Dickason, the initial gradualist approach to assimilation was replaced by the more overt policies of repression that were introduced after the so-called Indian troubles of 1885, which continued until the amendments to the Indian Act that occurred in 1951. Dickason has also argued that those Aboriginal people whose rights to education had been enshrined in the treaties had envisioned a very different purpose for that education than the federal government had. While Ottawa clearly saw the formal education they were to provide for Native people as a mechanism for assimilation, Native people saw such learning as a process through which the government could act on its promise: "to preserve Indian life, values, and Indian Government authority" (Dickason,1993, p.333).

With most Aboriginal people living in rural areas, the Canadian government chose to deliver formal education through the already existing network of mission schools operated by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, chiefly in the form of Residential Schools and, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at Industrial Schools located nearer to urban centres. The arrangement between the federal authorities and religious organisations was such that the government was mainly responsible for the provision and maintenance of school buildings while what went on within them was, in effect, usually the unquestioned jurisdiction of the churches. At the outset, attendance at these schools was not mandatory, although some informal pressure was often exerted by Indian Affairs officials and church representatives to get Native parents to send their children to these boarding schools. Later, attendance was made compulsory.

The Residential Schools were often located on or close to the reserves and initially provided a formal education for boys and girls aged between 8 and 14 years. Despite this proximity, contact between Native children and their families was relatively infrequent during term time, and carefully scrutinised when it did occur.

For her Master's Thesis, Linda Bull, herself one of the small but growing group of university-educated Aboriginal people interviewed some of the people who had attended Residential Schools, and her observations confirm some of the horrors that have been documented elsewhere (Bull 1991). In these schools education and evangelization often proceeded simultaneously within what was often a brutally oppressive regime. Rules of silence were rigorously enforced which made it difficult for children to practice their English, which for most was a second language. Teachers often maintained an emotional distance from the children in their care, food was often inadequate, daily routines were strictly enforced, and deviants were often harshly punished. Humiliation and corporal punishment were the main ways of ensuring absolute obedience to authority. Straps with studs were sometimes used, as were shackles and fists, to crush out unacceptable behaviours. Children who ran away to visit their families were always brought back and their heads were sometimes shaved to serve as an example to other children. Children were not allowed to speak their own languages or to read unauthorised materials, and they were sometimes referred to by numbers, rather than by their names.

The whole ethos of the Residential Schools was not dissimilar to that which had existed in the old Victorian workhouses and "Lunatic Asylums" in Europe and parts of eastern Canada. These schools were run like the "Reform Schools" in those areas where young delinquents were sometimes sent. However, the only "crime" most of the children sent to the Residential Schools had committed was to have had the misfortune to be born Native.

Bull's (1991) thesis includes as an appendix a copy of a Department of Indian Affairs certificate awarded to a 1934 graduate of a Residential School which illustrates the military atmosphere that pervaded these schools. This fortunate young man had survived his educational experience and had been awarded an "honorable discharge."

Hodgson (1992), a Native adult educator, has described the Residential School experience in the following way:

> Most of the first missionaries were very hardy and committed to living with and amongst Native peoples. They learned the language; they learned how to survive the harshness of the climate. They taught Native people farming and writing. The First Nations reciprocated, teaching the missionaries survival in the harsh climate. The arrangement was based on mutuality. The large formalised Residential Schools attracted a new breed of missionaries. Some really cared about the young people they were in charge of, but had been trained in a system that taught harshness and therefore they treated their students harshly. They were taught to believe that the more they sacrificed and denied their humanity, the closer they would be to God. Their seminaries and postulants' houses were not houses of warmth and love but places of sacrifice to God; places where you denied human comforts as a sign of commitment. They expected their students to hold the same values. Many of the nuns and priests had left home in their formative years. The loneliness of being away from their culture and families may have affected their lives deeply. In their religious education, they were taught to fear God's damnation for not saving the souls of "superstitious" children who believed that the land, rocks and plants had spirits. They also learned to cover up their own pain and offer it to God. They learned a form of discipline that was punitive and shaming. Some older nuns talk about having to whip themselves for the sins they committed - like thinking that the Mother Superior was an "old witch" - when training to become a nun. The system was based on "sin" and "good" and "bad", a radically different ideology than the one Native children had learned at home. By watching role models, like grandparents, the children were taught that you learn from your mistakes. The children were transported to Residential School by wagon, boat, car and, later, plane, under the authority of the Indian Agent, the RCMP and the priests.

> It was impossible to challenge such authority, which represented the government, the police, and the Church. Parents would be threatened with a jail sentence if they did not cooperate - either that or the Indian Agent would cut off the family's rations (Hodgson, 1992, pp.103-104).

Not all was bad about the Residential Schools. Native children were taught to read and write in English at these schools and also received some rudimentary skills training that might not have been available in their home communities. The Industrial Schools, while they lasted, had made an attempt to equip older Native youths with practical, marketable skills by combining a half of each day with training in agriculture, crafts, trades, and household duties, but in practice many of these schools placed more emphasis on running the school farm than on the development of the intellect. These early Industrial Schools were phased out during the 1920's because of their cost, but many of their features, particularly the combining of a limited academic education with vocational studies, continued for the younger Native children who were attending the Residential Schools. Fewer than 4% of enrolled students graduated from these schools with more than a grade 6 education prior to the Second World War, (Dickason, 1993). Of those who did complete high school, very few progressed through the postsecondary system, and any who did were forced to renounce their claim to Indian status and often at the same time, there was an added expectation and demand that they also give up their Native identity as a final act of assimilation.

After the Second World War, the Canadian Government began to retreat from these more obvious attempts at enforced acculturalisation of Native people, and the Residential Schools, which had numbered over sixty across Canada were gradually phased out, with the last one finally closing in 1988. Even so, their destructive legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of Native people, and many of the mature students returning to colleges and universities today have had firsthand experience of these schools.

These historic attempts to deliver formal education to Canada's Native people at best only prepared Aboriginal people for the most menial of occupations, while at worst, did such damage to children's self-concepts that many graduates of these institutions were left permanently emotionally incapacitated by their experience.

Dickason (1993), has captured some of these confused feelings in the following quote:

> When an Indian comes out of these places it is like being put between two walls in a room and left hanging in the middle. On one side are all the things he learned from his people and their way of life that was being wiped out, and on the other are the white man's way which he could never fully understand since he never had the right amount of education and could not be part of it. There he is, hanging in the middle of the two cultures and he is not a white man and he is not an Indian. They washed away practically everything an Indian needed to help himself, to think the way a human person should in order to survive (Dickason, p.336).

The way the Canadian government approached Native education historically reflected a colonial mentality similar to that displayed in other parts of the world. Wax (1989), in describing the plight of indigenous people in the USA, observed that from earliest times Indian tribes were viewed as too incompetent to run their own schools, and they were therefore forced to give up control of them at the same time as they were pressured to renounce most of their political independence. In that country, Indian children were required to attend oppressive boarding schools, similar to Canada's Residential Schools.

In Australia, the treatment of Aboriginal people almost exactly paralleled the Canadian experience. There, authorities largely ignored the education of Aborigines during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and their poor performance when they did attend school was often blamed on deficiencies in their innate intelligence or on parents who "lured" their children away from school. Even when Aboriginal parents did want an education for their children in government schools, there was often strong opposition to their presence from white parents, and it was not until 1972 that "community opposition" as a ground for refusing Aboriginal children entry to government schools was withdrawn from the official Teacher's Handbook. As a result, most Aboriginal students in Australia were historically educated in boarding schools after they graduated from the mission primary (ie. elementary) schools (Hill, 1987).

Fletcher's (1977) description of Aboriginal education in Australia could easily be applied to the situation in Canada:

> Studies of the relations between the education system and the Aboriginal people in the first one hundred and ninety years of colonialisation highlight the position of Aboriginal people as powerless objects of a process designed by others, on assumptions the Aborigines did not share, to meet goals which the Aborigines did not endorse. (Cited in Hill, 1987. p.7)

COLONIALISM AND EDUCATION.

In many of the former British colonies, education was frequently entrusted to religious organisations who often operated boarding schools similar to Canada's Residential Schools and little attempt was made to adapt curricula to local conditions or cultures. Sometimes this had ludicrous results, such as requiring African children to wear European-styled school uniforms, but the long term results have been more tragic. Altbach and Kelly, (1978) and Carnoy, (1974, 1990), in describing formal education in many nominally-independent former colonies have noted that not only was it the practice of many imperialist powers to impose their own curricula, pedagogies, and institutional structures on their colonies, but that any subsequent attempts to introduce more relevant educational approaches have been resisted by those who have the most to gain by maintaining the "status quo", or by those who fear that a "vocationalised" curriculum must inevitably be a substandard one.

As already mentioned, a parallel situation can be found within Canada, where Aboriginal communities have been seen as "internal colonies," and where attempts to render curricula culturally relevant have sometimes met with suspicion and fear that a second rate credential would result (Hannis, 1993).

Devrome (1991) has argued that colonialism is the domination of one culture by another, often for economic reasons, and that the maintenance of such a dominant/subordinate relationship often requires the adaptation or destruction of existing institutions to meet the needs of the most powerful of the cultures. Such changes, he has argued, often lead to the subordinate culture feeling dependent on the more dominant group.

Flores (1973) has used the term "cultural chauvinism" to describe the notion of colonialism within a nation's borders, and has argued that the maintenance of such internal colonialism depends upon the total absence of opportunities for the expression of any political autonomy. He has further suggested that: "this notion of cultural domination is that the colonised can neither interact nor define themselves because their way of life is not recognised by themselves or by the colonizer, except as pathological or atavistic." (p. 15)

Urion (1983), using a set of criteria developed by Van den Berghe (1984), has argued there is clear evidence that within Canada Native people function as an internal colony, citing the following observations to support his contention:

- Native people have been defined clearly as a distinct ethnic group that is ruled by others.
- Native land use and tenure rights are clearly distinct from those of others in Canada.
- There is the presence of internal government within the government designed specifically to deal with Native people, and the legal status of Native peoples in Canada is distinct, treating them collectively rather than as individuals.
- Native people as a group have been relegated to economic inequality, dependency, and inferiority in the division of labour and relations of production.

DEVELOPMENTS IN NATIVE EDUCATION OVER THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Carney (1988) has argued that the education that has been delivered to Canada's Aboriginal people over the last one hundred years has either been assimilationist in nature, or has been aimed at containing and isolating Native people. Given the oppressive nature of that education, as well as the colonial mentality of the federal government, it might have been assumed that the attempt to repeal the Indian Act, which the federal government outlined in its 1969 White Paper, would have been universally welcomed by Native people. In fact, as mentioned earlier, it had the reverse effect, and there was strong opposition to it from Aboriginal people who were suspicious of Ottawa's intentions, fearing that the repeal of this legislation would bring to an end the few rights that did remain for Treaty Indians, including the right to an education.

While this proposed legislation was eventually withdrawn, the White Paper served as an important catalyst in opening up dialogue about Native education both within Aboriginal communities themselves, as well as between First Nations organisations and the federal government. Cardinal (1977) has described how the National Indian Brotherhood established a working committee to develop an Indian opinion on education in 1971, and in 1973 the Department of Indian Affairs accepted the principles that committee had enunciated in its 1972 document entitled "Indian Control of Indian Education." There were essentially two principles articulated in that document: parental responsibility and local control over education. According to the authors of this publication, an Indian education would give Native children a strong sense of identity and confidence in their personal worth and ability, while the school curricula would recognise Aboriginal cultures, values, customs, languages, and the contribution Native people have made to Canadian development.

A federal document published in that same year committed the government:

> to support Indian people in ensuring their cultural continuity and development by providing Indian youth with the knowledge, attitudes, and life-skills necessary to become self-sufficient and contributing members of society (Barman, Herbert, and McCaskill, 1987, pp. 5-6).

While there has been some discussion about whether or not the federal government has honored all the pledges it made at that time to Aboriginal people, there is no question that some progress has been made in recent years in extending control over schools and postsecondary programs to the bands, and with encouraging more Native people to complete their high school education and to continue on to obtain academic credentials at non-Native institutions. Between 1981 and 1991 the number of Aboriginal people graduating from Canadian colleges and universities tripled (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1991), and there are currently about fifteen Aboriginal-controlled training and educational institutions across Canada (Barman et al. 1987). Whether or not these trends have really empowered Native people or merely accelerated the pace of assimilation into white society, albeit in a more subtle form, are the critical issues addressed in this research.

DEFINING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The steady increase in the numbers of Aboriginal people who have entered postsecondary educational institutions over the past few years raises profound moral questions for those of us who are cognisant of the harm that has been done to Native people in the past by professionals. The oppression of First Nations people may not have stopped with the demise of the Residential Schools, or with the federal government's abandonment of overtly assimilationist policies. It may simply be that the instruments of control have merely become more sophisticated. Indeed, given the damage that has been done to Native people by professional helpers in the recent past, there is a certain irony to the fact that social work training has become one of the most popular community college programs now being delivered off-campus to First Nations people in Alberta. Johnson (1983) has been among those writers who have documented the harm that Canadian social workers have perpetrated upon Aboriginal communities over the past thirty years, beginning with the "sixties scoop," when huge numbers of Native children, (who in previous years might have been confined to Residential Schools), were rounded up and placed in non-Native foster homes, often located far away from their families.

Most of the Native students now entering colleges and universities in Canada will find that their teachers are non-Native; that many of the textbooks they read will reflect the values of non-Natives; that the curricula they will follow have largely been developed by non-Natives; and that the education will be carried out by people who have received little instruction on how to effectively teach adults, and in particular those from another culture. Under these conditions there is a real danger that the education these students will be exposed to will not be a "liberating" one, but rather one that reinforces a sense of cultural inferiority, and graduates who will be disparagingly referred to by other Native people as "apples," red on the outside and white in the middle.

The research presented here is a limited and very preliminary attempt to explore whether or not these recent expanded postsecondary educational opportunities for Aboriginal people in Canada, far from ensuring the continuance of a distinct Native culture, merely represent a more sophisticated way to repress First Nations people and assimilate them into "mainstream" society. By interviewing Aboriginal graduates from an all-Native two-year community college social work program an attempt has been made to address several key areas, including:

- whether the level of cultural attachment changed in any way while the participants were in the program;
- the extent to which the participants' awareness of Native issues and their understanding of the role of social workers to effect meaningful change had been

altered while they were in the program;

- the degree to which the participants were committed to engage in direct social action on behalf of other Native people;
- the extent to which the participants felt that the education they had been exposed to had been a liberating rather than an oppressive experience.

Generalisations based on the findings of this qualitative research are not possible, but it is my hope that this study will encourage dialogue between Native and non-Native people alike, and pave the way for an educational system that, in the words of one Native Elder, will prepare Aboriginal people: "to walk in both worlds with one spirit" (Feehan and Hannis, 1993).

CHAPTER 2 - THE RESEARCH PROCESS

BACKGROUND

A common perception that Canada's Aboriginal people have been 'researched to death' is not supported by the evidence. Indeed, while Native people themselves may legitimately feel that there is always someone, somewhere, studying them, surprisingly little of that research has found its way into university libraries. One explanation of this phenomenon may be that most of the research has been undertaken in order to meet someone else's needs, rather than those of Native people themselves. As a result, a lot of useful information has ended up buried in long-forgotten government reports and student term papers.

A second possible cause of this dearth of material might be that Native people until quite recently have not been present in significant numbers in universities and other research institutions in Canada. At the University of Alberta, for example, there were only 47 Native students enrolled in 1978, most of whom would have been undergraduates, and half of those were in the Education Faculty (Assheton-Smith, 1990). By 1993, the numbers of Native students at that same university had increased significantly, with more than 286 new Aboriginal students joining their peers on campus in the fall of that year (Daye, 1993). Despite this impressive growth however, Native people continue to be under-represented at the University of Alberta and at most postsecondary educational institutions in Canada. As a result, there are comparatively few Native scholars available to undertake research with Aboriginal people.

A third possible explanation of this apparent shortage of scholarly research may be found in the understandable resistance of Native people themselves to subject their lives to the scrutiny of outsiders. Too often in the past, researchers have built expectations within Native communities, not always intentionally, that the authorities initiating research were equally committed to taking some action on the subsequent findings. This has not always been the case and has led to some scepticism and anger in communities struggling to address serious hardships.

As a non-Native person, I approached this study with some awareness of these conditions, and with an expectation that some of the first Aboriginal people I would talk to might be unwelcoming. In fact, this proved not to be the case. My doubts about initiating this research came more from within me, reflecting concerns about my own competence as a researcher, and uncertainties about the morality of a non-Native delving into the realities of Aboriginal people's lives. These doubts were reinforced by the comments of one of my university professors who boldly stated in class that research in Native communities should only be conducted by Aboriginal people. I was not encouraged.

These initial misgivings gradually dissipated as the research proceeded, and as I continued to reflect on my reasons for choosing this particular research project. I was born into a relatively poor British working class family just after the Second World War, and despite the development of a welfare state and the election of subsequent socialist governments, I have had first hand experience of oppression. Unlike many Native people, I was not discriminated against because I looked different from others, but rather, because I sounded different. In class-conscious Britain, social status is primarily assessed by the way you speak and as a child, I spoke with a pronounced working-class accent. Everybody else who attended the same elementary school as me spoke the same way. Just like many Native children attending the reserve school, I did not really know what discrimination was until I left the security of my neighbourhood school to attend, with the aid of a scholarship, a relatively prestigious grammar school. It was then that the term 'born to rule' began to take on a meaning, as my aloof, punitive, highly credentialled, Oxford and Cambridge university educated teachers proceeded to ridicule and label me, much to the amusement of my better-dressed and more self-assured peers. Like many Native people, I dropped out of school before completing grade 12, feeling a failure. To add insult to injury, the school sent a note to my parents when I was sixteen telling them that I would not benefit from further education. Their analysis went unchallenged. After all, who were we to question the wisdom of the experts?

These childhood experiences not only partly explain my decision to emigrate to Canada almost twenty years ago, but also they nurtured within me a strong sense of social justice and a concern for marginalised groups in this country, including Native people. Many Aboriginal people have told me over the years of similar experiences at school, and I have felt a bond with them. That's why I finally decided to do this research.

Freire (1973) has reminded us that people who have formerly been oppressed can sometimes in turn become oppressors. There was, therefore, no absolute certainty that I would approach this research with sensitivity and compassion simply because of my own life experiences. The same could have been true if the researcher had been Native. Not all Aboriginal people have experienced oppression at a personal level, nor are they necessarily free from contamination by mainstream culture. Fortunately, I emerged from my childhood experiences with a fairly healthy disdain for unearned privilege and a genuine concern for the underdog, and I believe that these perspectives were helpful to me in conducting this research.

My eventual justification for undertaking this research was that, at the very least, it could do no harm either to the participants in the study, or to Aboriginal people in general, and hopefully, by expanding our understanding of the needs of Native adult learners, it could do some good.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the beginning of the study, I was conscious of the need to develop a relationship of trust with the people who were to be helping me with the research. Not only did my own conscience guide the research process, I was also subject to other constraints, including those of the University of Alberta's Ethics Review Committee; the 'Ethical Guidelines for Research' developed by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples; and, as a Registered Social Worker in Alberta, the Canadian Association of Social Workers own 'Code of Ethics'. Essentially, the ethical parameters determined by these three organisations are similar and required that I respect the rights of participants at all times, and that the research itself would not cause any distress either to the participants themselves, or to the communities to which they belonged.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992), have suggested that with qualitative research there are essentially two critical ethical considerations: first, participants should enter research projects voluntarily, "understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved," and second, they should not be "exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive" (p. 53).

With these considerations in mind, I approached both the Chair of the Social Work Program at Grant MacEwan Community College (GMCC), Edmonton, Alberta, and the Director of Post-Secondary Education at the Yellowhead Tribal Council (YTC), Alberta, neither of whom was Native, for permission to conduct the study, both of whom agreed.

After I had been given permission to proceed with the research I discussed the purpose of the study with all the soon-to-graduate second year students in the GMCC/YTC Social Work Program. Since I was teaching a course to these students at the time, (Community Practice), I had easy access to all potential participants. Despite my belief in maintaining relatively egalitarian relationships between adult learners and teachers, I was acutely aware of the power differential that existed. I was therefore concerned not to exert any pressure for people to participate in the study. Clearly there would also have been a conflict of interest had I begun my research before I had completed my instructional obligations to these students, and as a result, the research did not commence until after I had completed my teaching assignment and the students' grades had been submitted to the college registrar.

In addition to these precautions, all the participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form, (See Appendix 1), which outlined their rights as voluntary participants in the study. The participants were also assured that their confidentiality would be respected at all times, and that pseudonyms rather than their real names would be used.

The specific research process utilised in this study consisted of a pilot interview with a former graduate of the program; a focus group involving seven of these recent graduates; two individual interviews with a further five of these graduates; and three individual essays from these same five graduates, (two of the participants were unable to complete their essays). The total number of participants was thirteen, consisting of one male and twelve females. All of the participants were Native except one of the focus group members (see Table 1, p. 30).

THE PILOT INTERVIEW

The study began with a pilot interview involving an Aboriginal social worker who had been a student of mine about five years previously, and who had since graduated from a university with a Bachelor's in Social Work degree. This pilot interview proved invaluable in that it both gave me some useful information and practice at conducting a research interview and transcribing the recorded information. As a result of this experience, I was able to refine the questions that were subsequently put to the rest of the study participants. (See Appendix 2.)

TABLE 1 - Description of the research participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age at graduation	Education level at commencement of program	Year graduated	Native
Lesley	M	42	Grade 9 plus occupational training	1994	Yes
Margaret	F	34	Grade 12	1994	Yes
Jocelyn	F	36	Grade 12 plus occupational training	1994	Yes
Tammy	F	33	Grade 12 plus 1 yr. college education in Psychology, plus occupational training	1994	Yes
Wanda	F	29	Grade 9	1994	Yes
Gloria	F	36	Grade 12	1994	Yes
Elsie	F	38	Grade 12	1994	Yes
Barbara	F	36	Grade 12	1994	Yes
Christine	F	36	Grade 12 plus occupational training	1989	Yes
Gertie	F	45	Grade 9	1994	Yes
Mary	F	46	Grade 12 plus occupational training	1994	Yes
Dawn	F	28	Grade 9	1994	Yes
Jennie	F	38	Grade 12	1994	No

THE FOCUS GROUP

The pilot interview was followed by a ‘focus group’ session with seven participants selected from among the twenty-four recent graduates of the program. All of the focus group participants were women, (there were only two men in this particular graduating class). Some of the participants had been in classes together for the duration of the program, while others had transferred in at later stages. The main criterion for selecting these participants was my assessment of their reliability and willingness to contribute to the group discussion. This interview lasted for approximately two hours and was tape-recorded and transcribed. The interview consisted of a series of open-ended questions, with the researcher spontaneously 'probing' into apparently related topics as they emerged during the discussion.

Krueger (1988), has described focus groups as "focussed discussion groups," where the intent is to identify the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes participants hold towards a commonly shared phenomenon, rather than to reach a consensus or to solve a particular problem. For me, having trained as a social worker, facilitating this group process proved to be a fairly straightforward task. The group was assembled in a relatively comfortable classroom setting, sitting around a table with a small tape-recorder placed in the middle.

Following Krueger’s guidelines, the open-ended questions were predetermined, carefully sequenced, and gave the appearance of being spontaneous. (See Appendix 3).

According to Krueger, the ideal conditions for ensuring the most trustworthy responses of focus group members exist when the participants are strangers. Not only was this not the case in this instance, but, as has already been mentioned, the moderator was also well known to the group members as a person who had previously been in a position of some authority. There were also some specific process difficulties associated with this particular focus group. These included some initial technical difficulties with the tape-recorder which caused some anxiety for the moderator, and the subsequent use of a less-powerful back-up machine; the periodic inaudibility of some group members; occasional distractions as other people opened the classroom door; and the perennial problem with groups - some participants talked a lot while other members remained mute.

For practical reasons, this focus group had been scheduled to take place at the premises of the Yellowhead Tribal Council before the students had completed all of their electives. Several of the participants lived some distance from this building and were to be starting jobs as soon as they had finished their program. However, this scheduling, reinforced by the cultural differences between me and the participants, might have caused further distortions in the group process. It was clear from some of the participants' responses, for instance, that I was seen, at least some of the time, as an instructor, and therefore as an authority figure, even though all the participants knew that I no longer had any influence over their academic lives. This may have helped to explain why some participants were more willing to talk than others. It also probably led to a perception some of the time that I was primarily conducting an evaluation of the Social Work Program, with the consequence that some of the responses to the questions were quite course specific. For example, while I was interested in the relevance of curriculum and effective teaching and learning strategies, some of the anecdotes shared about individual instructors and the stories about the perceived injustices that some students felt had been perpetrated upon them took the discussion away from other, broader issues that we could have been exploring as a group. Even so, the fact that some of the participants felt safe about raising these concerns with me suggested that a certain climate of trust had been established that, in turn, could permit openness in other areas of discussion. In addition, I did not feel that the amount of time the group spent listening to individual concerns was excessive, and I felt that an appropriate balance between specific issues and a more reflective, analytical dimension was maintained most of the time.

In qualitative research the relationship between the researcher and study participants is of crucial importance, and my intent to present as a trustworthy, sensitive, and competent researcher could have been restricted by factors over which I had no control, namely my gender, my age, and my culture. Although I have been associated with the 'feminine' profession of social work for more than two decades, I was socialised as a male, and undoubtedly continue to communicate as a male. Given my awareness of the tendency for men to generally interrupt women more often and to talk longer (Giles and Street, 1985), I was conscious of the need to facilitate dialogue rather than dominate it. Even so the participants might have engaged in some 'self-editing', despite my 'low-key role', and they may have avoided talking about some issues in the group, because of our gender differences.

Chronological age and life stage might also have caused some distortions to the focus group process. Although the age range of the group, including the moderator, was from the early thirties to the late forties, there were important differences in terms of life experience and life stage. Some of the participants were either married or in common-law relationships while others weren't; some had grown children, while others were still actively involved in parenting younger children. Under such circumstances there is the ever present danger of the younger group members deferring to the older ones if they perceive them to have greater wisdom. Moreover, this phenomenon might be of particular concern to focus groups such as this one, where the majority of participants were Native, since the wisdom of the elderly is particularly revered in Aboriginal communities. In fact, this dynamic was not present in this group, although one of the older participants did have a more forceful presence than the others.

A third factor that could have influenced the process of this focus group was the fact that the moderator was not a Native person. Some former Aboriginal students of mine have told me that they sometimes feel uncomfortable with the non-Native obsession with time, an obsession that can cause us to communicate in an overly-focused, intrusive way, rather than allowing discussion to unfold at its own pace. Other Native students have suggested that, in classroom discussions, they prefer to be asked specific questions, rather than to be invited to participate in a more general way. Doug Smith, in describing the experience of teaching at Blue

Quills First Nations College (Feehan and Hannis, 1993), has noted that:

> Some Aboriginal students considered themselves to be at a disadvantage when an instructor's question was not directly put to them but rather presented to the entire class. This was a cultural issue. Three Aboriginal students came to my class one day and said, "We're never going to be able to compete. We're always going to be described as shy and quiet because we only speak if a question is directed to us. You know what it's like in that classroom. You throw out a question like it was a basketball, and all the non-Aboriginal students leap to grab the thing, while the Aboriginal students sit and wait!" If instructors hope to involve Aboriginal students in classroom discussions they must learn to ask each student personally what he or she thinks about an issue. Native students won't interrupt instructors, out of respect, and if instructors respect their students, then they must adapt their communication style and ask students individually for a response. (p.171)

These comments suggest that when working with a focus group comprised largely of Native people, moderators should be alert to cultural differences, and perhaps be more directive when calling on someone to speak, and less intrusive once that person has started speaking. Even so, in the case of this particular focus group, there is a danger of exaggerating the importance of the cultural differences between the participants and the moderator. As already mentioned, one participant was non-Native while the degree of cultural attachment among other group members varied. Some of the participants lived in the city, while others lived on reserves close to Edmonton, where they could easily be influenced by the non-Native urban culture. Some of the participants had a good understanding of Native culture, and practised some aspects of it regularly, while others didn't. Even so, during the actual process of the focus group, the moderator did attempt to hear the views of the quieter members by specifically addressing questions to them.

THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The individual interviews started about a month after the focus group and were conducted on the main Grant MacEwan Community College campus in Edmonton. These initial interviews followed a pre-determined open-ended format, (see Appendix 3). Five participants were selected to participate in these interviews, four women and one man. All were Native, with varying degrees of cultural attachment. When selecting these individual participants, note was taken of the degree of insight and verbal abilities they had displayed in the course I had previously taught. Following these interviews, which were tape-recorded, the tapes were transcribed and the documents were then given to the persons interviewed with the advice that they were free to change them in any way they wanted, including making additions and deletions. In fact, very few changes were made. After this, the tapes were destroyed. These initial interviews were fairly general and wide-ranging, with the predetermined questions being supplemented by spontaneous questions arising from the participants' replies.

After the first interviews had been completed, the transcripts were reviewed and preliminary themes were identified. These included the participants' previous formal education experiences; the barriers the students had to overcome in order to access the program and remain within it; the impact the program had had on participants and their families; and the participants' perspectives on the role of Native social workers. A second interview schedule was then prepared incorporating these themes, and these were pursued in some depth during the next interview. (See Appendix 4.)

THE INDIVIDUAL ESSAYS

In addition to participating in two separate interviews, the five interviewees were also asked to write a personal essay which addressed several predetermined questions (see Appendix 5). These essays were not read by me until after the individual interviews had been completed. This was part of a 'triangulation' process, to avoid researcher bias in the information gathered. The fact that only three of these essays were actually completed was disappointing, but it proved too difficult to obtain the other two for personal reasons on the part of the interviewees.

RATIONALE FOR SELECTING THE RESEARCH METHOD

In selecting a research method, my social science background, and in particular my training as a social worker, led me towards a qualitative approach. Initially, I considered several different qualitative methodologies, including grounded theory, ethnographic inquiry, and phenomenology, but finally abandoned all of these as being too ambitious for a limited study of this nature. Instead, I settled for a straightforward form of naturalistic inquiry, using a relatively unstructured interview approach. My primary concern was to gain a better understanding of the participants 'in their natural state' and to take note of the meaning they attributed to some key events in their lives, and in particular, the changes they perceived had occurred and might perhaps continue to occur for them as a result of being a student in a two year diploma in social work program. I was interested in finding out from the participants themselves the extent to which they felt they had been empowered by their participation in the Social Work Program, in both their personal and professional lives, and the extent to which their education had enhanced their willingness to work towards general improvements in the quality of life for Aboriginal people.

The question of bias and objectivity is one that all researchers are confronted with, whether they are undertaking qualitative or quantitative studies. Being familiar with a phenomenon to be studied beforehand can be advantageous since a researcher has a sense of the issues to be explored, but it may also result in preconceived ideas which can, in turn, lead to an unnecessarily narrow research focus. Sandelowski et al. (1989), have drawn attention to this apparent paradox, and have suggested that one way of addressing this issue is for the researcher to conduct a thorough literature review before beginning any naturalistic inquiry, with the object of broadening the researcher's awareness of the complexity of the issue. For this research, I had had a long-standing interest in Aboriginal issues and had therefore read fairly widely over a number of years and a more in-depth literature review was not completed until after the interviews had taken place.

Being known to study participants beforehand carries with it the advantage of being able to establish the necessary climate of trust which is a precondition for 'thick and rich' information being gathered. On the other hand, there is also a danger of a 'researcher effect' distorting the quality of the information collected. In describing the characteristics of human relationships, Adler and Towne (1993) have noted that, in general, human beings usually like people who are similar to themselves and are drawn towards people whose characteristics complement their own. In addition they are typically attracted to people who can help them, who are competent and human, who self-disclose appropriate information about themselves, and who are encountered often. All these factors can affect the researcher/participant relationship. For example, in their desire to secure our approval of them, to help us be successful in our studies, or avoid anticipated conflicts with us, participants might distort the quality of the information shared with researchers.

Thus, in this study, I had to be aware of two sources of bias: my own, which determined the approach I took to the research and the interpretations I placed upon it's findings, and that of the participants themselves. While such bias is unavoidable, it does not necessarily invalidate a study's findings. In fact, as Borg et al. (1993), have pointed out, many qualitative researchers argue that all research is value laden, (p.197). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) have questioned the sometimes assumed absolute reliability and generalisability of quantitative research, with its emphasis on a rigorous, 'objective' scientific method of data collection. They cited the scientist, Dalton (1967), who has pointed out that:

> Many eminent physicians, chemists, and mathematicians question whether there is a reproducable method that all investigators could or should follow, and they have shown in their research that they take diverse and often unascertainable steps in discovering and solving problems'. (p.60)

The discussion about the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative research reflects deeper philosophical perspectives about the nature of knowledge, and can be traced back at least to the writings of Plato and Descartes who drew a sharp distinction between 'rational' objective knowledge, and subjective, emotional knowing (Reid 1986). For Reid this "assumed dualism can be profoundly destructive" (p.2). Even for the most objective researcher, it is argued, some degree of subjectivity is present as concepts are being defined and interpretations being made. This is precisely the concern of some feminist scholars, including Smith (1990), and Belenky et al. (1986), who have argued that in schools and postsecondary educational institutions it is the 'rational' male way of knowing and presumed objectivity of scientific inquiry that is most likely to be valued.

For some the question is not so much: "Is quantitative research better than qualitative research?" but: "Which research methodology is best suited to answering the research question?"

Marshall and Rossman (1989), have suggested four criteria for assessing the usefulness of qualitative research:

1). The level of truthfulness of the study's findings (credibility).

2). The generalisability of those findings (transferability).

3). The validity of the findings (dependability). And

4). The absence of researcher bias (confirmability).

Guba and Lincoln (1982) have suggested that these criteria can be assessed in the following ways:

To assess credibility by asking "Do the study findings have the appearance of being true? In particular, do the study participants find the researcher's analysis and conclusions believable? To assess transferability Guba and Lincoln suggest that it should be possible to make a reasoned judgement about the transferability, (i.e. generalisability) of the research findings. Dependability, according to these researchers, requires a consideration of the processes used to gather information, and in particular, whether different ways have been used that would enhance the level of truthfulness in the study.

Finally, Guba and Lincoln (1982) have suggested that a thorough exploration of the researcher's implicit and explicit assumptions and biases will address the final assessment of the quality of qualitative research, namely, confirmability.

These criteria were applied to this research by making all transcripts and the study findings available to the participants for their comments; by the researcher paying close attention to his values and biases; by employing a 'triangulation' methodology which utilised three different ways of gathering information, namely the focus group, individual interviews, and personal essays; by making a reasonable judgement about the study's transferability; and by asking if the study's findings have the appearance of being true.

CHAPTER 3 - BREAKING THROUGH INVISIBLE WALLS: OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

Critics of postsecondary education in Canada and elsewhere have suggested that access to a university or college is not necessarily determined solely by academic ability or motivation. Social class, gender, and ethnicity can all influence an adult learner's ability and enthusiasm both to search for and to find a place on an appropriate educational program. Despite the illusion of openness, many potential students find that college and university campuses are surrounded by 'invisible walls' that are every bit as effective at restricting access as the Berlin Wall once was at maintaining a divided Germany. Cross (1981), has noted that the barriers that adult learners typically confront can be categorised in the following way:

1). Institutional barriers, such as restrictive admission requirements, high fees, and inconvenient class schedules

2). Situational barriers, such as the geographic distance between home and school, and/or competing demands for time from employers and family members and

3). Dispositional barriers, including cognitive limitations and emotional blocks to learning.

All of these barriers were faced to some extent by the participants in this study and their tenacity in overcoming them should not be underestimated. Some of these hurdles had to be cleared before these students could even contemplate applying for the Yellowhead Tribal Council/Grant MacEwan Community College (YTC/GMCC) Social Work Program, while others were present at varying levels of intensity throughout the two years the participants were attending classes. Even (1987, 1988) has described some of these barriers to learning as the "baggage" that often accompanies adult students at all times, including:

1). Age, experience, and self-concept

2). State of health

3). Personal philosophy and values

4). Emotions and memories

5). Motivation, attitudes, and interests

6). Culture, history, and preferences; and

7). Intellectual abilities and perceptions.

The interplay of these variables is frequently complex and it is this complexity that has partly led to Brookfield's (1990) observation that a classroom comprised of adults engaged in a "transformative" educational process can frequently become an "emotional battleground." Under such conditions, learning consists not merely of the development of cognitive capacities or the acquisition of a specific set of skills, but also requires the development of insights and a heightening of self-awareness and personal change. In my experience as an adult educator, such transitions can sometimes create stressful tensions between educators and students, between students and their peers, between students and their families and friends, and within the students themselves, as they are forced to examine their personal values and deal with their own "unfinished business."

The notion of the classroom as an "emotional battleground" is an interesting one, particularly to those of us engaged in adult education within cross-cultural settings. More will be said about this later when the specific dynamics of the YTC/GMCC learning environment are examined (Chapter 4). It should be noted however, that some of the stresses that several of the participants experienced while in the program were undoubtedly present at the time they were contemplating returning to school. Three sources of stress that were often cited by participants were fear of change, fear of the unknown, and fear of failure. Lee (1990), has observed that our self-concept is often related to our need for predictability and the ability to manage our personal environments, while Brookfield (1990), has identified and labelled some of the collective fears many adult learners have when they return to full-time study as the "Imposter Syndrome." Both these factors were present for most of the participants in this study. Several of them spoke of disempowering life experiences while they were growing up, particularly ones related to poverty and living with an alcoholic parent, and of how these had shaped their sense of themselves and their perceived ability to succeed at college level studies. Several participants also admitted to experiencing feelings related to the Imposter Syndrome after they had been accepted into the program. According to Brookfield (1990), these feelings typically consist of feeling guilty about being at college, faulty assumptions about one's academic abilities (frequently based on previous disempowering experiences with formal educational systems), and a fear of humiliating rejection from the program once these deficiencies are uncovered by the authorities. I can identify with these feelings. As a working-class Britisher, I have vivid personal memories of feeling incompetent and of being a fraud as I attended various universities in the UK, and even today, many graduate courses later, I still experience some of these irrational thoughts, particularly during times of personal stress.

This study was only able to draw upon the experiences of a small sample of students, those who had been successful in at least partially overcoming some of the practical and emotional barriers to their learning before entering the program. These participants might not have been typical of the many potentially competent Aboriginal social workers who did not apply to the YTC/GMCC program in the first place because of their fears of failure, or for some other reasons, or for those who dropped out.

SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS FACED BY STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study reported that they encountered similar barriers to accessing postsecondary education as those reported by adult learners elsewhere. Most of the study participants were women with family responsibilities and several reported that they had delayed returning to college until their children were in school. Once in the program, many of the students reported feeling stressed by trying to continue to meet their family's needs while getting their assignments done. Some felt uncomfortable and guilty because their decision to return to school had caused some financial hardship for their families. One male participant captured that feeling in the following way:

> I had a lot of discussion with my family (before entering the program). It seemed that after my past bout with alcohol and everything else, and trying to get my head above water financially, it seemed that we had just got to that point and then having to tell my wife that we have to cut back a bit if I'm going to go back to school and if she's prepared to do that. Initially she wasn't too keen on that, saying that she had put up with enough shit over the past fourteen years, and she was beginning to enjoy this better life financially and materialistically, and now all of a sudden we have to cut back, and she was not too impressed at first. But now everything's OK. It doesn't seem that the materialism is all that important anymore, and the

> quality of life is a lot better, on a spiritual and emotional basis. (Lesley)

This same participant went on to say that once he had entered the program his whole family had begun to take an interest in what he was studying, to the extent that his wife would take pride in telling her friends what grades her husband was getting in his course work. She was also reportedly thinking of returning to school herself, as indeed was one of the couple's adult children, inspired by Lesley's success.

Another participant had given up a secure government job she had held for many years in a search for more fulfilling employment, and clearly she had some ambivalence about the decision to return to school:

> I quit (my job), took a break for two weeks, and then I started school. At the time I had no money except some severance pay that would be coming in a couple of weeks. I went to school that first day and told people that I wasn't sure where my funding was going to come from, but that if I needed to I could fund my own way. Two months down I finally got my funding, and they gave me back pay. When I first started I didn't know where I was going to get my money to pay tuition and living expenses. I thought that I might have to get a job or something. Another barrier was mostly my kids at home. They were missing the attention they got. I didn't have weekends for them anymore. That was starting to affect them. My husband was starting to feel neglected, so I started to think twice about it and asked myself if I was doing the right thing....About two or three months Christmas came along and I thought:" Oh God! At least if I was working we wouldn't be in this predicament." (Margaret)

A deterioration in the participants' income levels after they had entered the program was a theme echoed by several of the former students. Some of them had continued working part-time while in the program which had led to some reported increased levels of stress. Lesley described his attempts to meet the escalating demands of the course while continuing to work to support his family in the following way:

> Sometimes I would work a bit in the morning before I would go to school

> and cut down on my sleeping time. If I got home late, I usually worked until ten in the evening, I'd go home and unwind for maybe half an hour or so, then go down and do my homework for one, two hours, maybe three, whatever it took, depending on when the assignment was due, or the exam, and then probably go to sleep for three, maybe four hours, and then get up an hour or two earlier and complete or go over whatever I had to before I went to school. (Lesley).

One female participant had succeeded several years previously in breaking into the male-dominated world of heavy equipment operator in the construction industry, and had therefore been able to fund her studies out of her savings and UIC payments, and by returning to her old job during the summer months. For other participants, full time study meant a continuation of the financially impoverished lifestyles they had led before they had come into the program, either because they had been working at low wage jobs, or, as in the case of one participant, because of unemployment resulting from an injury sustained in a car accident.

In addition to having to overcome financial barriers, some of the study participants also experienced anxieties related to their struggles to understand the content of the courses they were taking, or else they experienced some stress related to the confusion that often accompanies courses that require some personal growth and reflection.

Some participants reported that they felt some resentment because other students appeared to be more favourably treated than they were, particularly as far as funding was concerned. Some students were sponsored by their bands while others had to rely on other, often less generous sources of funding.

Some of the participants reported that initially they had had some misgivings about entering an all-Native program, fearing that it would either be second rate or perceived by potential employers as being second rate, or that the non-Native instructors would be patronising and culturally insensitive. It appears that these fears were not justified for the most part, and once in the program most participants seem to have appreciated the opportunity of learning within this quasi-Aboriginal environment.

The degree of apprehension felt by participants at the outset of the program was not just related to their previous educational experiences or fears about being plunged into poverty. For at least two of the participants their reported ambivalence was accompanied by feelings of resentment at being forced to return to school. One participant felt that her band council had directed her to return to school as a condition of retaining her employment on the reserve, while another participant had been required to give up her job when the Chief in Council had passed a resolution that prohibited both spouses from being simultaneously employed in managerial positions in their Native community. Neither of these two students had had a burning desire to become social workers when they had entered the program, and their motives for registering in the courses had been more expedient. A third student also reported that her decision to return to school had had less to do an intention to become a social worker, and more to do with the opportunity the course presented to open up new avenues of employment in the future:

> See what I wanted to do in the first place when I applied for the Social Work Program was that I was going to go beyond that and join politics or something and be an advocate for Native Rights and stuff like that....I thought that I might be able to get into a management position in social services somehow. (Jocelyn)

Jocelyn is now enrolled in a Bachelor in Education program at university and is planning to become a teacher in a rural Native community when she graduates. It is not clear if this career decision reflected a change in her original goals, or if she feels that she can be more effective politically as a teacher than as a social worker.

Some participants reported that they had had an incomplete knowledge of the program before they applied, although this did not seem to be a problem once they had begun their studies. One participant did report however, that she had initially been 'floored' by the amount of personal disclosure from her peers in some of the courses, and the amount of personal pain expressed through these stories.

For some of the participants, simply hearing about the program seemed to have been an accidental process, particularly for those not connected to any of the bands affiliated to the Yellowhead Tribal Council. One participant, a young woman with a Grade 9 education, had been left a widow with two small children a few years earlier, and had been forced onto welfare because of a back injury. Fortunately for her, she had received some employment counselling while she had been unable to work, and some testing had revealed that she had some aptitude for the helping professions. However, her counsellors had not told her about the YTC/GMCC program, and she had missed the deadline for applications for the Social Work Program on the main GMCC campus for that year. Luckily, she knew of a relative who was employed as a social worker and was able to call her to find out about her options.

Lesley's experience in locating the program was equally serendipitous, and was preceded by pressure from his former employers for him to seek treatment for his alcohol problem. During his beginning phase of recovery, not only did Lesley develop an interest in Aboriginal culture, but also in returning to school, specifically to become a helping professional. He had in any case been contemplating a career change for a while as he faced what was, in his words, a "midlife crisis." He was helped in this quest for a new beginning by at least two mentors, one from the past, in the form of a previous father-in-law, and one in the present, the coordinator of the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program. His first wife's father had urged him years before to get an education, advice which Lesley had ignored at the time. More recently, George, the coordinator of the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program, was both reassuring and supportive. Lesley described his experience of getting into the program in this way:

> So anyway, I applied for social work. I also started believing in my higher power and this spirituality in all of us. This thing that we have in ourselves, more than out there. Doors started slamming on me. And I thought: "OK.This is not meant to be". But then again I thought:"I'll just have to keep on trying". So I went to Athabasca University. I was going to try correspondence. Doors were shut in there for one reason or another. Then I looked in the back of the book, (Athabasca University's calendar), and YTC's number was on it. So I phoned out there and George. George was probably the most motivating force in getting me into the program. Doors started opening in a lot of areas and it seemed like where I shouldn't have probably succeeded, and I think it was a result of this higher power that doors were just opening....So one thing led to another, and I couldn't believe. I was just overwhelmed. I had to do the skills appraisal exam to get into the program.... And being out of school for twenty-seven years. Reading, writing, and spelling. I've always tried to spell, write, and do some reading. Even then, I was kind of overwhelmed by the examination.... I was kind of intimidated by this examination. Seeing everybody being prepared, like all these other students were younger than I was and they all had their six pencils, pens, eraser. And here, I didn't even have a pencil. You know, I want to go to school and I'm not even prepared. I don't know if I'm prepared mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually,or anything. But, so I anxiously awaited the results of these examinations, and it was supposed to be four weeks or six weeks or something like that, and eventually....six weeks to the day, I phoned George and he said:"I have your results here". And I said: "Weren't they supposed to be mailed to me?" And he said: "Yeah. But I have them. You'll be receiving them in the mail shortly". "Anyway". He said."You passed. No problem. We accept you". (Laughter). (Lesley).

As has just been described, the process leading up to acceptance into the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program differed between participants. For some it was a well planned, intentional event, sometimes voluntary and sometimes not, with some participants having a stronger motivation to become social workers than others. Sometimes the desire to go back to school was precipitated by some critical incident, a kind of epiphany, such as the threat of dismissal from Lesley's employers, his "mid-life crisis" and his subsequent newly discovered self-awareness; or Margaret's boredom with her job and the change in parenting responsibilities that accompanied her children's enrollment in school; or Wanda's back injury that forced her to give up her career as a waitress; or a change in policies at the band level that forced one participant to train for a new career and another to seek a credential in order to hold onto her job.

Whatever these precipitating events were, once in the program the hardships of daily life had a tendency to continue to impinge on the participants' studies. Most of the female students continued to try to attend to the needs of their immediate and extended families while at the same time trying to meet assignment deadlines. Many had to drive considerable distances, sometimes under difficult weather conditions, often in less than reliable cars, or had to leave their families back on the reserve while they were forced to relocate to Edmonton. These circumstances all added to the already elevated stress levels associated with being a full-time student. This was a pattern that Restivo (1990) had noted with earlier YTC/GMCC classes:

> during the four years that GMCC offered the Social Work Program through the Yellowhead Tribal Council near Edmonton, six students had babies, one student had two babies, and in order to continue in the program two other students, both pregnant, commuted weekly from their

reserve, about 150 kilometres away. (Cited in Feehan and Hannis, p. 183)

The stress and guilt felt by those students forced to move to the city and leave their families behind was similar to that which has been observed in similar settings elsewhere. Collier (1993), for example, described a situation at a college in Quebec where most of the Native students were temporarily living a considerable distance from home:

> Native women find themselves not only torn between their children present here and their school responsibilities, but also by their children in their communities. Often, they have left other children with relatives - maybe a daughter. And while most Native people conceive of the family very differently from the majority of southerners, they still feel deeply the absence of their children. (p.39)

It is difficult to capture on paper the anxieties that many of the YTC/GMCC students experienced while in the Social Work Program, and it is a tribute to all the participants in this study that they were able to graduate at all. Not all of their peers were as fortunate, and while the attrition rate on this and similar outreach programs is generally higher than on the main campus in Edmonton, given the extraordinary nature of the hardships endured by students, the number who dropped out was remarkably low, (about 30%). McLaughlin (1980, 1984, 1985), has made the same observation when evaluating similar Aboriginal social work programs in the Yukon, and at Slave Lake and St. Paul, in Alberta. These studies have all suggested that the on-site program coordinator, who frequently acts as a tutor, mentor, counsellor, and advocate, often plays a critical role in ensuring a student's success in a program.

Success and failure in such programs have an impact that goes well beyond individual students and their families. The whole morale of a community can be affected: they serve as powerful incentives or disincentives for other Native people to return to school.

Not only can the fear of failure be a formidable barrier to accessing postsecondary education, but so too can the fear of success. Some people who have experienced a lot of failure in their lives sometimes derive comfort from continuing that pattern of failure, rather than changing it. As an adult educator, I have periodically come across students, not necessarily Native, who, when close to graduation, have appeared to deliberately sabotage their own efforts to succeed, rather than dealing with a situation that is unfamiliar to them. One other possible explanation of the fear of success besides continuing some predictable patterns might be a fear related to what Brookfield (1990), has described as "cultural suicide." This concept is likely to be most relevant when the dominant epistemologies present within an educational setting reflect different cultural perspectives and life experiences than those of the students. Feminist scholars such as Belenky et al.(1986) and Smith (1990) have already alerted us to the ways in which some women can feel alienated from educational institutions where "male" knowledge and learning processes are the most likely to be recognised and rewarded, while other writers have suggested that a similar "chasm" can exist when there is an ethnic and/or class difference between teachers and students. Adult learners who are attending "mainstream" academic institutions often feel that the price they have to pay to succeed academically and economically is to sever all ties with their culture and to risk losing their authentic identity in the process. For some of these students, ongoing pressure may be exerted by families and community members to prevent cultural contamination from occurring. In my experience, common forms of such pressure include labelling and ridicule. Thus, in my own case, I was accused by friends and family members of getting "fancy ideas" above my station when I first went away to university. Successful Blacks have been accused of becoming "Uncle Toms" and "Coconuts" under similar circumstances, while the equivalent and equally hurtful term for Natives is "Apple." Although more Native people are attending postsecondary institutions today than ever before, and such taunts are becoming rarer, there is still the potential for such accusations to act as disincentives for Aboriginal students to return to school.

One participant, Margaret, felt that she had begun to drift away from her culture and from her community as soon as she had moved to the city as a teenager, and she too, had been criticised by other Native people when she had gone to work for the federal government. For her, those criticisms cut deeply, even though they had taken place more than a decade before she began college, and she became tearful while recounting them to me. Even so, she did note that with more of the members of her reserve having completed high school and some postsecondary education in recent years, there appeared to be more tolerance towards Natives going back to school and working for non-Native organisations than in the past.

PARTICIPANTS' PREVIOUS EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The participants in this study had experienced similar challenges that could have affected their ability to do well in this program. All were Aboriginal people and several had failed to complete high school.

The majority had major child-rearing responsibilities; most had grown up in extreme poverty; many were adult children of alcoholics; some had experienced significant emotional deprivation while growing up; several had been the victims of racism as children; most admitted to some feelings of ambivalence about returning to school, and the level of family support varied from one student to another.

Young people who leave school after completing grade 12 and immediately go on to college or university often come from relatively financially and emotionally supportive backgrounds where the successful completion of a postsecondary education is both expected and valued. Children raised without these advantages, as most of this study's participants were, often have more immediate priorities. One common pattern among these participants was to be raised in homes characterised by extreme poverty, often accompanied by alcohol abuse and sometimes with violence. Transiency and health problems were also frequently in evidence in these families of origin. A significant number of the participants failed to complete high school, and had married and become parents at quite an early age. Most participants indicated that they had not usually been dissuaded from completing high school and going onto university and college, but that they had not been particularly encouraged by their families to do so.

One female participant completed high school mainly because of the encouragement she had received from teachers, but had chosen a well-paid career in the construction industry, rather than to go to college or university. She explained her experiences this way:

> (a postsecondary education) was never a consideration. That was never anything we sat around the dinner table and discussed. College or university, it was never something that Mom and Dad saved for from the time you were born to send you off to college. It wasn't discouraged, it just wasn't talked about as an option.....You knew that you had to get a good job, and you had to do well in high school to have a diploma.

> You've got to have grade 12 to get a good job. That was the theory of all of that. (Tammy)

Another participant echoed this theme:

> at times I was told by my parents that I could be a doctor or a lawyer etc., but yet I felt never really encouraged in my education. The message I really received was so long as I could get a fairly decent job or at least steady work, (that was OK). (Lesley)

One participant enjoyed school so much that she returned after successfully completing grade 12 to do another year, but didn't consider going on to college or university. Another participant had been thwarted by deadlines. After moving to Edmonton as a teenager and moving four times in as many years, she seemed always to be too late to register in the courses she wanted, and after graduation she drove a school bus for a couple of years before opting for a secure government job.

Of all the participants, perhaps the toughest time was had by a woman who had moved alone to the city when she was fifteen and had attempted to support herself while going through school:

> When I was in grade 9 I wasn't living at home...So I had to have a job. So I worked from three until eleven, (as a waitress), plus going to school all day, and I had to cut the last class to make it to work on time. After a couple of months of that I just couldn't do it anymore. It was too hard. From seven in the morning until twelve at night. I just couldn't handle it anymore. (Wanda)

This student's hardships continued when she was widowed at an early age and forced to give up her twelve-year waitressing career after being injured in a car crash. After graduating from the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program this student moved with her children but without her partner to another province, to complete a Bachelor of Social Work degree.

Among the most distressing stories of schooldays told by several of the participants were those of racism in the classroom, and how such incidents had eroded their cultural pride and self-esteem. Lesley talked about feeling a sense of shame at being Native and of being taunted by other students because of his Aboriginal heritage:

> My dad would always say: "Be proud of being an Indian". But I couldn't see anything to be proud of, because he drank, and the areas of town where he usually associated were near Skid Row and that. It always seemed that the only Natives I knew just drank all the time. So I really didn't have anything to be proud of. (Lesley)

Another participant talked about the embarrassment of her grandfather being the local drunk in a small town, while a third student was reduced to tears as she recounted the stories of her schooldays:

> At the age of seven I began school on (the) reserve. It was a very frustrating time for me because we only spoke Cree at home and I didn't know how to speak English. I continued school on the reserve until I got to grade four, then I was transferred to the elementary school in (a small town). At this school I faced discrimination and racism for the first time although I didn't know it at the time. All I knew was how inferior I felt. I didn't fit in because I was not white. I was called many derogatory names and I grew up to hate being "Indian"... I went to junior high in a small town and they were mostly farmers. They just made it difficult for us because we were Native kids...I remember fighting with a lot of the kids because I didn't know how else to handle conflict. So I used to fight with little girls, little boys, anybody. And then my marks started picking up and I did very well in school. So a lot of the kids learned to have respect for me....But it wasn't like that for everybody. It was still really hard for some of them. If your marks were good and you were there everyday you could get along with them. But if you weren't at school everyday, and for a lot of us there was a lot of alcoholism, things like that in our families, so it wasn't easy for us to get to school. (Margaret).

These early school experiences were not uniformly bad for all participants. Jocelyn spoke of the hardships of surviving in the bush and of how she had enjoyed going to a Residential School, although she did admit to feeling sometimes intimidated by some of the teachers.

Schools were not always culturally alienating. Wanda had been cut off from her cultural roots when her parents had separated when she was a girl. When she began attending school in the city during grade nine she began to socialise with other Native persons; her identity as an Aboriginal person was strengthened in the process.

THE DEGREE OF CULTURAL ATTACHMENT AMONG PARTICIPANTS

One final barrier that participants had to overcome was related to their sense of Native identity. As already mentioned not all participants had been raised with a strong sense of a Native culture as something belonging to them, or which they belonged to and indeed some had been made to feel ashamed of their Aboriginal heritage. There was therefore some admitted ambivalence among many of the participants about entering a "Native" social work program. Not only was this uncertainty related to concerns about the quality of the instruction that would be offered, but also to having to admit ignorance about one's culture in front of one's peers.

The degree of cultural attachment differed amongst the participants, with some of them, mainly those who had lived most of their lives on relatively remote reserves, being more "traditional" than those who had been raised in cities, Residential Schools, or on reserves close to Edmonton. Several of the participants told compelling stories of their struggles to preserve or discover a sense of their cultural identity while they were growing up, or as adults, in the few years before entering the program.

One participant wrote:

> I remember vaguely, going to the Residential School at (a small northern Alberta town). I was probably 5 or 6. I remember not understanding the language, but you learned to do as the others did. You'd learn to function as robots, I'm sure that's probably what we resembled. All of us dressed the same, had the same haircut, and weren't allowed to speak Cree. If we were caught speaking Cree or if we were scared and lonely and crying we'd get strapped.
>
> I remember having trouble speaking in class and crying when asked to get up in front of the class. To this day I still feel these insecurities haunt me from time to time. Perhaps because we weren't allowed to be our own person and to feel. We were trained to be "nice", and not express any feelings or thoughts. I think you tend to develop a state of mind that doesn't question thoughts or ideas, almost like you go through life in limbo, in a daze of sorts. (Gloria)

Gloria, now a single parent, initially married into a reserve where the traditions were significantly different from her own. Now she struggles to understand three cultures, the one she was born into, the one of the community she lives in, and that of the dominant white society where she works. While struggling to comprehend the meaning and place of culture in her own life, Gloria is also trying to pass along appropriate Aboriginal values to her own children.

Another participant's experience of Residential School was less negative:

> When I first started school I was seven or six and did not speak a word of English. The school was run by Nuns. We were not permitted to speak our own language and they made us wash our hair with some sort of smelly shampoo to kill lice. If you followed the rules it was nice going to school. I learned to adapt to change. (Jocelyn)

Jocelyn, who has strong physical characteristics that leave others to have little doubt that she is an Aboriginal person, appears to be comfortable with her "Nativeness" and her limited understanding of Native culture. A Treaty Indian, Jocelyn had lived in a Metis community before going to Residential School, and as a result, had known more about Metis culture than that of her father's band. For her, attendance at Residential School had not been a negative experience for the most part, and had equipped her with the capacity to embrace change, something she had already had to do before entering the Social Work Program.

Lesley grew up in the city and talked of feeling ashamed of his Native ancestry and of his efforts to try and hide it from others. He also indicated that he had known very little about his Aboriginal culture when he had decided in his late thirties to seek treatment for his longstanding addiction to alcohol. Yet when he did choose to deal with his addiction, he chose to attend a Native treatment centre, Poundmaker's Lodge, near Edmonton, where an emphasis is placed on helping residents understand Aboriginal culture and spirituality, as well as the nature of their addiction. The selection of Poundmaker's Lodge by someone who had denied his Native heritage for so many years was puzzling, even to Lesley himself:

> It took me three months to get into this treatment centre, and I can still remember meeting with a counsellor from the Employee Assistance Program and she asked me: "Why do you want to go to Poundmaker's ?" And I said: "Jesus. That's for Natives". And I says: "Well, I think I have to know where I'm coming from before I know where I'm going". (Lesley)

CONCLUSION

The participants in the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program confronted many of the same barriers commonly faced by other adult learners. However, their personal stories testify to the enormity of the task of facing them. The next chapter will examine the impact the program had on the participants themselves, and whether or not they emerged from this educational process with a stronger sense of their own cultural identity and with the skills to work as effective helping professionals.

CHAPTER 4 - ASSIMILATION OR LIBERATION? THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PARTICIPANTS

INTRODUCTION

As pointed out in the previous chapter, most of the participants in this study were faced by a number of challenges both before entering the program as well as while they were in it. Some of these struggles were related to the changes that were occurring for the students as a result of being confronted by new ideas and ways of thinking. This chapter will question whether or not these struggles were worth it, both for the individuals themselves, as well as for their communities. Specifically, the participants' perceptions of how the Social Work Program changed them and their view of social work will be examined. Among the questions to be considered are whether or not the program brought about any transformations at the personal level; whether such changes, if any, affected the graduates' sense of cultural identity; and if, as a result of participating in the program, graduates developed a stronger committment to bring about change at a societal level, particularly for Aboriginal people.

PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT

Saul Alinsky, a North American social activist who spent most of his life working with poor and marginalised groups, including North American Indians, defined power as "the ability, whether physical, mental, or moral, to act" (1971). For me, there are two critical elements to the concept of power: 1). the personal feeling of being able to change one's environment if one wants to, and 2). the willingness to take such action on behalf of oneself as well as for others. The related concept of empowerment is concerned with feeling powerful and of being able to influence the direction of one's life and the forces that shape it, at both macro and micro levels.

Several of the participants in this study reported that they had grown up believing that they had no control over their lives, and that they, as Native people, were often viewed by other Canadians as incompetent, second rate citizens, whose culture was inferior to that of the dominant society. Sometimes this sense of inferiority was reinforced by patronising attitudes, or in other cases by overt expressions of racism. For some participants, these resultant feelings of powerlessness were compounded by the abuse they had experienced as children, frequently associated with alcohol and drug abuse and family dysfunction. Low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy often accompany and encourage a sense of powerlessness, and as a result, social workers often stress the importance of self-esteem building and helping people experience success when they are helping clients to become more empowered. Social work programs often operate on the assumption that greater self-awareness among students is a necessary precursor to empowering clients in the belief that "You can only take the client as far as you have gone yourself."

In the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program great emphasis was placed on personal growth both at the outset of the program and throughout its duration. Several participants found this emphasis to be helpful and personally empowering.

One participant was able to share a specific example of her growing assertiveness:

> This was within my life a month ago. We did a role play (in class), on elder abuse. And I researched the information but I didn't do anything because I wanted to wait until school was over. Then I'd do something about it. But because of my parents' health it couldn't wait. So in order to

> get anything going I had to be really assertive with this one RCMP. He was starting to yell at me. I yelled back at him. He got louder. I got louder. The work started from there. So he works with us now, and because of that there has been some work done. (Elsie)

Elsie attributed this new found assertiveness to the program. Gertie expressed similar sentiments:

> I know I've changed. I was scared of hurting other people's feelings and not really considering mine. And I learned to speak out. And, I guess, learned to sit back and not take any more shit. Like in my own personal life, whatever. I learned to stand up on my own two feet. Just like sitting back and not doing anything the first year of school. I was more or less wanting to, (but) didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings. I wanted the whole class to get along. This year I more or less felt well, I think you'll do your thing and I'll do mine. I learned to be number one. Another thing I learned is how to take care of myself... My confidence was something I'd never had when I first started off. But now I know that through the support of my sisters and friends that all of a sudden I realise that: "Hey! I can do this". And when I realised this, it was the thrill of a lifetime. Yes, I really changed lots. (Gertie)

One participant described what it had been like to be on welfare before coming into the program, and how the program had equipped her with the self-confidence to go on to university:

> It wasn't good, (being on welfare). My self-esteem was really bad. The only thing that kept me going was the children... You felt everything you do is scrutinised... I've met quite a few single mothers, still I'm meeting them. And they are always asking me stuff, and it's good because I basically know what they need to know. It also made me realise that I can't just stay with my diploma. I have to go further. (Wanda)

Later, this same participant made the following observation:

> Before I started (the course), I didn't have the self-esteem and confidence I do now. Sure, I still have to work on it more, but even my family and friends have all noticed the change in me. I was the type of person who if I felt I had something to do with the system and someone would say "No" to me, I'd take it at that. But now I've changed in that way. (Wanda)

Wanda was able to give a concrete example of how she had been able to use her newly-found self-confidence to assert her rights:

> It was to do with my funding. They were underpaying me, and I caught that. So I decided to write a letter to them, and normally I would never have done that... And they back-paid me. (Before), I would have asked: "Who was I to look at authority? To change anything". (Wanda)

As well as learning in classroom settings, students in this program were also required to be in a field placement at a social service agency where their practical skills could be assessed. Wanda, who had worked for many years as a waitress before entering the program, reported that while doing her practicum she had developed the self-confidence to approach judges in the court system and discuss her clients' needs with them.

This theme of increased self-confidence and assertiveness was reflected in some of the comments made by other participants. Gloria had been educated in a Residential School and had moved away from her own community to be closer to her husband's relatives when she had got married. After enduring years of abuse, she finally divorced her husband and continues to live in his community. She had begun the Social Work Program several years before but had been forced to drop out because of family pressures. This time she was able to finish the program. She presented the following example of how she felt empowered by this educational experience:

> I'm divorced. I was in an abusive relationship and I've been raising kids by myself. Before I found that when I was in the relationship I was taking the blame for everything. Like my whole life I was walking on eggshells all the time. And I've become a lot stronger but I've also learnt how to deal with him. Like he still has contact with us and he'll phone and he's very dominating. And I still have a lot of fear of him... (but) I've become stronger. (Gloria)

Like some of her colleagues in the program, Barbara has learnt to say "No" more often to her family and friends and to pay more attention to her own needs:

> Before, it didn't matter who it was. They needed their kids to be taken care of or they needed someone to talk to, it was always me. And I was burning out. Now I can say: "No, I'm busy. Call back"... I've been told that I'm more aggressive. My husband doesn't like it. I said: "Too bad. Get used to it". (Barbara).

Despite her husband's expressed concern about Barbara's transformation, he nevertheless appears to have been supportive of her goals:

> In my placement there was this disagreement between my supervisor and me... And I came home and said: "I'm quitting. I'm quitting school". And my husband said to me: "So you're giving up on your people? And I thought about it and that is what I was doing. I was using my anger. I was misdirecting it against all the people, not just the ones I was having the difference of opinion with. So I thought about it, and I went back and it worked out. (Barbara)

Adler and Towne (1993) have suggested that a relationship exists between self-esteem, communication skills, and the willingness to either accept or reject others. Most of the participants acknowledged that their self-esteem had improved while they were in the program, helping them to become less defensive, more assertive, and more self-assured. These changes helped the participants improve their relationships with others and to become more accepting of individual differences. Margaret made specific reference to this in her interview. Not only had her family found her less angry and easier to get along with since she had entered the program, she herself had also become more tolerant of the apparent inadequacies of others:

> When I look at people with addictions in my own family I used to think that they have a lot of will power. They can quit if they want to. Now I realise that they don't. That they need a lot of help. And there isn't anything I can do. I can't force anyone to stop drinking... I think that the thing that is important is educating them about addiction. Because a lot of them don't know what they are doing to themselves. Nobody's ever said:

> "This is what alcohol can do for you". And I guess nobody ever really cared enough to just even listen to them. So I guess that the way I look at addictions has changed the way that I look at people. (Margaret)

Another participant attributed her improved communication skills to the program:

> For me, I developed a lot of confidence and became more outspoken. But really I learned how to communicate. I always thought I knew how. But I didn't realise it until I was in this course that I didn't know how. And now I know how to communicate a lot better. How to be a lot clearer and really listen to people and make sure I understand what they are saying. I got more confidence and stuff like that too. There's been a big change for me with that too. (Jennie)

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Despite the potential for formal education to weaken cultural and family ties, the reverse seems to have been true for most of the participants in this study. Instead of alienating students from their families and from their culture, the most common experience for most of the participants was that their closest relationships had been strengthened, and their levels of cultural understanding and attachment had been enhanced. Lesley, for instance, noted that his relationship with his wife and children had greatly improved since he entered the program, and it was clear that not only did they have a new respect for him, but also saw his success as an inspiration for them to return to school.

Like Lesley, Tammy had worked for many years in a relatively well-paid "blue collar" job before entering the program. While pursuing her studies she found that her relationship with her parents, and in particular, her mother, had greated improved:

> The program has helped me a lot with understanding my parents, and all of the parenting that I experienced through them, and our relationships. My Mom for instance, has never told me she loves me, or my brother or sister either. She is totally non-affectionate. She doesn't hug, kiss,

> whatever. I know she loves me, and I've known that all along, But she, for whatever reasons, can't display that. The program has helped me to come to terms with that. To be able to accept that, and stop trying to change her. And to try and find some quality in the relationship that we have. (Tammy)

The greatest change took place with friendship patterns, and with less intimate relationships. Wanda, for example, reported that her children enjoyed doing their homework alongside their Mom at home in the evenings, and that this seemed to strengthen the bond between them. At the same time she also noted that many of her old friends had gradually stopped calling her while she was in the program, a development she attributed to their unwillingness to change themselves in the way she had, as well as to her lack of time for socialising.

Lesley kept working part-time at his old job while he was in the program and found there that his colleagues began to treat him in a new way. These changes, in part, he attributed to his loss of status when he became a casual rather than a full-time employee. They might also have been related to his sobriety and consequent unwillingness to accompany his peers to the bar after work. Lesley noted that since being in the program he had developed new insights and this sometimes meant that he was less willing to support his work colleagues' positions on contemporary social issues such as the federal immigration policy. This in turn, had increased the potential for more interpersonal conflicts to occur at work. Even so, Lesley found that among some of his former colleagues a new found respect for him had emerged, with some of them affectionately referring to him as "Professor", teasing him about becoming a full-time student, and seeking his views on a variety of issues. His former boss even expressed amazement at the positive changes he had seen occur in Lesley since he had given up drinking and entered the Social Work Program.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON THE SENSE OF NATIVE IDENTITY AND LEVEL OF CULTURAL AWARENESS

One result of the program was that some of the participants found their sense of identity as Native people was strengthened. This enhanced degree of cultural attachment was not just because of the Native culture modules that were inserted into the program, or the periodic visits by Elders to the classroom, but it also emanated from discussions amongst the students themselves. These conversations helped those students with little understanding of their culture to learn more about their heritage; they also helped build a sense of kinship between participants from different bands. Some of this new learning was not only empowering for the participants themselves, but also for their family members. Wanda told a moving story about her Aboriginal mother-in-law to illustrate this last point:

> Even my mother-in-law, she's Native. She was taken away as a baby and put in a convent. She saw a couple of Natives on the bus once that were drunk. That's her picture. And it wasn't until she met me that she started to get into her picture of Natives. Because that was what she figured. All Natives were evil. They were just drunks. But she's starting to get a different picture... (Before), any time her son did anything wrong it was like: "It must be the Indian". She always attributed everything that went wrong to that... Now she accepts that she's Native. It all started off with me telling my child to call my mother-in-law: "Kokum", which means "Grandma". But my mother-in-law kept thinking it was not a nice word. So I had to explain to her that it was the highest word, and that it was good her granddaughter was calling her this. And then my mother-in-law would start asking me other questions. You can tell that she's starting to come around. She's even put in a search with Indian Affairs to find her natural family. (Wanda)

Not all the participants found being in an Aboriginal classroom was a liberating experience. Jocelyn, who had had positive experiences while being educated in a Residential School, was consistently critical during our interviews of the dynamics of this class, as well as of some of the teaching strategies employed and the content of the courses. She admitted to feeling bored a lot of the time while in the program, partly because she had done a similar program before, and since graduation she has decided to pursue a career in teaching rather than in social work. She expressed her thoughts this way:

> It was very difficult being a Native person in a school with all Native people, and their ideas of what a Native person should be and racism and all that. They really confused me. Every time I do this kind of course with Native people they confuse me even more. Because some of the students in the class were telling me they were really into the traditional Native way of life, yet I saw so many things that didn't fit with my definition of what a traditional Native was...Take the four symbols, kindness, strength, honesty, and so on. It all has to do with caring. Yet there was a lot of friction in the class, and it didn't go with these teachings. Native people always had these different clans that were warring against one another. I think there was a lot of jealousy and competition in the traditional Native way of life a long time ago, and I think that is still very evident today. (Jocelyn)

Jocelyn was the only participant in this study who was unenthusiastic about her experiences as a student in this Social Work Program, and this may have been in part related to her reasons for entering the program in the first place. It seemed that her original decision to register in the program had less to do with becoming a frontline social worker than with her desire to use this learning opportunity as a stepping stone to university or to an administrative position. All the other participants in this study acknowledged that they had been empowered to some degree by the program. Most reported that they had gained greater self-awareness, enhanced self-esteem, and a stronger sense of their Native identity while they were attending school, and that they were committed to working as social workers, although not necessarily exclusively with Native clients.

Lesley was not brought up with a strong sense of cultural pride and while he was in the program he continued to struggle to define for himself what being a Native is:

> I don't know if there is such a thing as an Indian way of thinking in a spiritual sense. If that is the case, I think that is what I am trying to do. I was in a group one time where someone asked an Elder:" What is an Indian?" He gave all these answers and then finally said: "It's just a human being". I've noticed a lot of Native people are actually humble and don't take enough credit where it is due....What culture means to me is a part of an identity. You identify yourself with your culture. That was one of the main things for me because before I didn't really have an identity except as an Indian. But that was in a negative sense. But when I did find out that we did have a culture, I perceived being Indian as being a more positive thing. And with education I don't think that would assimilate people so much. It could strengthen their Nativeness. And again, I think it's more up to the individual than any teaching institute. I guess too, it depends on the culture and how they've learnt it. If you go out and seek it, it may not mean anything to you. But if you let it come to you, then it will have that much more value. (Lesley)

Lesley was in his early forties when he entered the program and had begun his journey towards greater self-awareness two years before, after he had been forced to confront his alcoholism. He had clearly enjoyed being in the program and his marks indicated that he was one of the top students. He had found that the program had helped both with the level of his understanding of himself, as well as with his tolerance of others:

> I'm a lot less judgemental. I'm not ashamed to say I don't know anymore, whereas before (I'd say): "Oh yes, I know this or I know that." I ask questions. I'm not afraid to try and learn something new. Especially now.

> If I don't learn something new everyday, it seems like the waste of a day. Whether its current events or... This turban issue and the (Canadian) Legion. I remember maybe four years ago when I was: "Why the hell do they have to push their way into the legion with a turban?" But now I've turned that around. Someone asked me about that at work the other day who I would consider to be a rednecked Albertan. And I said:" As far as I'm concerned there are more important issues in the world than turbans. These guys fought and died with their turbans on. The British Legion does not care if they wear their turbans or not. What difference does it make?" That was the end of the discussion. (Lesley)

Clearly, some degree of personal transformation had taken place for the majority of the participants while they were attending college. Critical to this transformative process were the instructors and the decisions they and administrators took concerning curriculum, scheduling, and the teaching methodologies employed. The remainder of this chapter will consider the participants' views on the quality of the instruction they received, the relevance of the curriculum they were exposed to, and the extent to which the graduates' perceptions of what a social worker does were changed as a result of being in this program.

PARTICIPANTS' OBSERVATIONS ON INSTRUCTORS

The participants in this study, when interviewed as individuals, said little about the instructors they had been exposed to in this program, although Jocelyn did express some concerns about some of the instructors' interpersonal styles. Members of the focus group were however, a little more outspoken. The expectations this group of Aboriginal students had of instructors was not that different from those expressed by students in other educational settings. Instructors who were knowledgable and able to communicate in a clear and sensitive way were likely to be the most highly valued. Typically, social work students also value honest and appropriate self-disclosure by their teachers and respond well to educators who are approachable, empathetic, and flexible. However, as members of the focus group pointed out, too much flexibility, particularly around assignment deadlines, punctuality, and attendance can provoke criticism and resentment, which can in turn damage group harmony. Some participants felt that persistent latecomers to class showed disrespect and should have been punished in some way, while others felt that fluid deadlines for assignments were unfair to those students who strived to meet them, and that they rewarded the unmotivated students. Instructors who strived to bring culturally relevant materials and case examples to the classroom were also appreciated, while one participant derived some comfort from learning that her life experiences as a Native person were similar to those experienced by Aboriginal people in other parts of Canada and in other parts of the world.

One participant who had graduated from the program several years before and who had subsequently gone on to study for a social work degree at university made specific mention of the value of mentorship. I conducted a 'pilot' interview with Christine at the outset of the research and found some of her comments could be usefully included in the final research. Christine is now a prominent leader in the local Aboriginal social work community and almost dropped out of the university program because she felt that she did not belong there. Her struggle was not just with understanding course content, but also with finding acceptance among her predominantly younger and apparently more privileged non-Native peers, and with professors who appeared distant and judgemental. When she found that her university grades fell below those she was used to at college, she became resentful and demoralised, and was ready to quit. She felt that her former college instructors had misled her by overgrading her and telling her that she was more intelligent than she actually was. Consequently, her self-esteem had begun to deteriorate. Fortunately for her she had established a close relationship with a former college instructor who not only encouraged her to stay in the university program, but also acted as her personal tutor for its duration.

PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

As mentioned earlier, not all the participants in this study had voluntarily entered this program, nor had they a strong committment to the profession of social work. One participant had been pressured to return to school as a condition of maintaining her employment on the reserve; another had been forced to seek another career because of a change in band policies; and a third person had viewed the diploma program as an opportunity to open up access to a university education, leading to a career in teaching.

Even among those participants who did enter the program with the specific intent to become social workers, many admitted to having a fairly narrow understanding of what social workers actually did. The commonest perception of the role of social workers was that they dispensed money to those in need, or apprehended children who were deemed to be at risk. Wanda described her initial understanding of the social worker's role as being: "Like a secretary to the government. You can't go against any of the policies."

Like Wanda, Margaret's experience when she was left in charge of her family at the age of seventeen had also reinforced the image of these professionals as being mainly dispensers of cash and material support:

> I guess I've always been a social worker. When we were younger my Dad was an alcoholic, and he was a violent alcoholic, and when my mother was in hospital I got a social worker. I contacted a social worker at the hospital and said: "I'm not going to stay at home and babysit the kids". I had to give up school for two weeks while my mother was in hospital. So I took the kids and talked to that social worker and told her that I'm not going to keep them here because I know what my Dad gets like and I don't want them to get hurt and things like that. So they put us up in a motel, and my Dad was in that great big house all by himself. Which didn't make any sense. Anyway, she came and got us. There must have been six or seven younger kids, brothers and sisters, and she put us all in her car and drove us to a motel room and gave us money for food. It had a little kitchenette thing. And that's where they all went to school from. They had to take the bus. They didn't even have a change of clothes or anything. It was really funny. I put the girls in one bed and the boys in another, took all their clothes, told them to stay under the sheets, and took their clothes to the laundromat. (Margaret)

While most of the participants appeared to have only the vaguest of notions about social work when they first applied to the program, it seemed that these perceptions began to change from the moment of first contact with the program coordinator. Once students began to attend courses and were placed in social agencies for their practica, a greater awareness of the counselling functions of social work began to develop:

> My placement was at Poundmaker's. I noticed that a lot of them come from the same background I do. And they're so blind, like I was. They can't see how alcoholism is affecting them or their families or anything. And I was like that too. I couldn't see beyond my nose for a long time. (Margaret)

Jocelyn had attended a similar program before and felt that she had a good appreciation of the counselling role of social workers before she returned to college. For her, a social worker: "is a caring person who really wants to know about you and everything in your life. Asking you how they can help you or guide you."

Lesley had been to see a social worker some years before for family counselling and had not found it a helpful experience. At the end of the program he was able to describe a social worker as being:

> A kind of sounding board. A mirror... I used to give advice to people quite a bit, thinking I was helping them. I try not to do that anymore. Instead, I try to get them to reflect on what it is they may want, and for them to seek ways to achieve those goals. The answer they are seeking is not going to come from me, it's going to come from them. (Lesley)

As the course proceeded and students were exposed to discussions around social policy and community intervention, several participants broadened their understanding of the social work role to include advocacy and social action. Wanda, one of two participants who went on to university directly after the college program, did so because with a degree she felt she would have more power to effect change within the organisations and communities she would be working in. Two other participants, Lesley and Tammy, also expect to go on to university at some point, and are also anticipating some political role for themselves in the future. Christine, the one participant who graduated from the program a few years ago, is already actively involved in policy formulation at both the local and provincial levels.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It is clear from talking to these participants that the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program was, for the most part, a transformative and empowering experience for them. By becoming more self-aware and gaining a greater understanding of the issues facing Native people and of ways of addressing them, the participants indicated that they felt more confident to advocate for themselves and others, and that overall they had a stronger sense of their own identities as Native people.

In particular, the majority of participants graduated from this program with an enhanced sense of cultural attachment and identification with the Native people. While my hope would be that this change in self-identity would help participants to be better able to resist assimilationist pressures in the future, the data gathered through this research is not able to support this assumption. While in the program, however, most participants discovered, perhaps for the first time, an aptitude for study and an enhanced ability to communicate effectively, and a greater self-confidence to pursue their goals.

Lesley made the following observations at the end of the program:

> I'm not supposed to regret the past. I've learned a lot about myself, and possibly other people are going through the same thing as I've gone through, that it's never, never, too late to change. And even though I've wasted twenty-five years of my life, I don't think that it was all in vain. I guess I'm here for a purpose, and hopefully social work is my purpose. I've never really had goals in my whole life, because I was into all this other stuff, and finally I can see down the road, at least a lot further, as to where I'm heading, whereas I couldn't before. I was just going along blindfolded. And now I have this vision of where I'm headed. (Lesley)

CHAPTER 5 THE RELEVANCE OF THE RESEARCH AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

EXAMINING THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

My interest in Native education began twenty years ago when, as a newcomer to Canada, I was appalled to learn that most Aboriginal people did not complete high school and that Natives were overrepresented amongst the poor and those who suffered the most in this country.

Although I too, left school at the age of sixteen feeling alienated and a failure, my parents, as far as they were able, had continued to provide me with emotional support. This helped me retain the modicum of self-esteem I was able to draw on when I decided to return to school for upgrading three years later. Two years after that, to my surprise, I was offered a place at a relatively prestigious British university.

Many Aboriginal people have not had the same advantages as me. As a working-class child I learned that my social status was inferior to others, but I was also fortunate to be born at a time when attitudes were changing. The expansion of educational opportunities that accompanied the election of a Labour government meant that it was easier for me to get to university than it had been for my parents' generation. However, for me, as well as for the many Aboriginal people in Canada today, this greatly improved access to a postsecondary education presented a two-edged sword. Education can both liberate and oppress.

The potentially contradictory functions of formal education, to both facilitate healthy change and to reinforce existing injustices has long been acknowledged in the literature. Historically, in Britain, attempts to make the working classes more literate, and to extend a university education to them, have not always been fired by an altruistic intent, nor have they always been successful (Jepson 1973; Kelly 1962; Morgan 1988).

Ken Coates (1979), a former coalminer turned academic, captures beautifully in the following quote the ambivalence some past reformers felt with the expansion of educational opportunities to the working classes in Britain:

> There is an often told story which describes the squire's wife, a pious lady, trying to persuade her practical husband, in spite of his fear of sedition and Paine-ite agitations, that compulsory schooling might be a good thing. "Don't you think", she asked him, "that the children ought to be able to read the Bible?" "Yes", he is alleged to have replied, "but with difficulty".

Given the often crudely assimilationist intent of attempts to educate First Nations people in Canada in the past, Native people today too, have good reason to be sceptical about attempts to extend educational opportunities to them.

The relatively significant increase in the numbers of Aboriginal adult learners attending Canadian universities and colleges in recent years raises significant questions, including the following: What are the assumptions of the policymakers who have engineered this trend? Who stands to benefit the most from this development? Will improved access to a postsecondary education accelerate the pace of "cultural genocide" for Native people? Will the price of success for educated Native people be total assimilation into mainstream society? Will participation in such educational activities further rob Aboriginal communities of their most gifted members? And am I, and other adult educators like me, perhaps unwittingly, contributing to a process of cultural destruction? This research set out to try and address some of these concerns by reviewing the experience of some Aboriginal social workers who had recently graduated from a two-year diploma program that had been delivered by a non-Native community college.

Several writers have challenged the presumed neutrality of formal education systems and have suggested that the most valued epistemologies in postsecondary institutions can make certain students feel alienated, inadequate, and inferior. Among those most likely to experience these feelings are members of the working-class, women, and cultural minorities. Stephen Brookfield (1990), who himself once felt marginalised as an adult learner has suggested that many mature students feel as though they are imposters when they return to school, and the price of success for many is to commit cultural suicide, by changing their ways of relating to family and friends, and of interpreting and acting within the world around them.

In this study, I was interested in identifying the barriers that the participants had to overcome in order to access a two-year community college program and what motivated them to succeed; the changes that occurred for them while they were in the program; and how they saw their role as social workers in the future.

In beginning to establish a context for this research, I was drawn towards the work of those scholars who have argued that formal education systems reflect the dominant ideologies of contemporary hegemonies, and as such, serve the essentially political purpose of preserving the "status quo". Among the earliest writers to make these observations were Marx (1938), and Gramsci (1973), while others, including Michael Apple (1979, 1982), Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Paulo Freire (1973, 1981, 1985), Henri Giroux (1983), and Ivan Illich (1971), have all developed these ideas further.

Historically, a tension has always existed around the purpose of education, between those who have seen it as a necessary evil, to produce an efficient workforce that can potentially reproduce existing societal inequalities, and those who have viewed education as a vehicle through which a more just society can be created. Sometimes this underlying tension is played out, frequently at an inexplicit level, around discussions concerning access to programs, curriculum, and teaching methodologies, and during debates about whether postsecondary institutions should "train" or "educate."

In recent times, the literature on formal education as a mechanism by which one social class can justify repression of another has been supplemented by parallel observations related to gender and ethnicity. Some of the core arguments are similar, namely, that formal education systems serve the interests of one dominant group, usually comprised of white middle-class males, at the expense of others, including women, blacks, immigrants, other visible minorities, and Native people. According to these arguments, not only is access to a postsecondary institution a challenge for members of these marginalised groups, but once in the classroom, these students may find that the way knowledge is constructed, transmitted, and valued seems alien to them.

Similar observations about education as an instrument of oppression have been made in relation to colonialism. In particular, Altbach (1978), and Carnoy (1974, 1990), have noted how some nominally-independent former colonies in other parts of the world have been kept in a dependent state by their former colonial masters, and how formal education systems in those countries have often been designed to perpetuate these dependencies. Not only do these systems continue to replicate the injustices that previously existed under colonial rule, but attempts to redesign them have often been met by resistance either from those who have the most to lose by such reforms, or from those who have the most to gain. While the elites in these former colonies have often been able to ensure the perpetuation of their power by gaining access to those scarce credentials that are rewarded by powerful external organisations, less well-educated people are often suspicious of, or indifferent to attempts to "vocationalise" curricula and render them more relevant to their lives.

Some writers (Devrome 1991, Roberts 1982, Urion 1983), have argued that many of these manifestations of colonialism are present within Canada today and impact, in particular, upon Aboriginal people. Freire (1973, 1981, 1985), in his work with marginalised groups, particularly in Brazil, has observed that oppressed groups often immerse themselves in a "culture of silence," and that people who have themselves been oppressed in the past may, in turn, eventually become oppressors themselves.

According to the literature, some of the commonest ways colonial forces have perpetuated oppression, apart from a continued stranglehold over economic development, has been through the expression of a presumed superior set of values and beliefs that may not necessarily be explicitly stated. A story by an urban-based, non-Native university professor who was team-teaching a community college social work "Methods" course for an all-Native class with an Aboriginal person, illustrates this point (Zapf, 1993). In his narrative, Zapf describes how he had to move from the relatively safe role of "expert," into a more intimate two-way process of engagement with students as he was forced to confront his own beliefs and stereotypes about Native people. During this particular class, Zapf reported that after the students had been exposed to an empowering consciousness-raising experience, he was challenged on his own assumptions about the practice of social work and Native people in general, and was able to recognise for the first time that the phases of social work intervention he was teaching exactly paralleled the stages of colonialism that Native people had been exposed to in Canada in the past. This insight was a painful and truly transformative educational experience for both Zapf and the students he was working with.

ANALYSING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

A literature review related to the topic of Native adult learners indicates that, despite the common belief that there is a large body of research on Aboriginal people comparatively little scholarly material exists to substantiate that claim. Furthermore some of the research that has been done seems to have been based on a "deficiency model," and has set out to prove that somehow Native people are different from the rest of us, and sometimes by implication, not quite as good. Several studies have tried to prove, for example, that Native people learn in a different way from other students and consequently require a different curriculum and exposure to different instructional skills. Data to support such claims has often been elusive. Elliot (1994), for instance, in a study of adult learners in a community college social work program, found little evidence to support the claim that Native people have different learning styles to non-Natives, and warned against overgeneralising and stereotyping.

Research completed by the B.C. Ministry of Education (1984), resulted in a similar conclusion, and the suggestions by its authors on how to be effective teachers of Native people seem to be no different than those made by other writers on how to create an empowering learning experience for any adult learner. These included the creation of a collaborative rather than coercive learning environment; the establishment of a healthy rapport with students before making significant intellectual demands upon them; using culturally-relevant course materials; motivating students through praise and constructive criticism; emphasising the cooperative aspects of learning; being open to teasing; using informal teaching approaches; and being willing to recognise and build on the students' early experiences of success.

These observations on how to create the ideal learning environment for Native students are supported by the comments of former social work students at Grant MacEwan Community College. Peacock (1993), for example, stressed the value of learners "taking ownership" of their program; being free to talk about personal experiences and feeling supported when they did; being exposed to "hands on" learning while at the same time being exposed to the "big picture"; having some cultural content; and having a mentor. Beaulieu (1993) also valued the emphasis the program placed on personal growth and appreciated being helped to see the connections between the underlying causes of the problems many Native people face. For her, of particular importance was the incorporation of Native cultural practices in the classroom, including the morning circle and prayer. Lalonde (1993) has echoed some of these themes, and has also spoken highly of the personal growth component of the college program. She made the following unfavourable comparison between her university and college experiences:

> University was a particularly challenging experience for me. In the first semester I considered quitting many times. I received subtle messages from some professors that caused me to question my abilities. For example, I heard that as a Native student I would probably have a difficult time at university because I was at an "academic disadvantage". Also, (I was told that) students who had a community college background would not do as well as students who came from another university program. I felt very isolated and incapable of completing the course work required. The atmosphere of the university was totally different from my college experience. However, during one class I heard a quote by Nietzsche that stayed with me and summarised my university experience: What will not destroy me, will make me stronger. I repeated those words to myself many times. When I finally graduated in 1990 I indeed felt stronger for having successfully met the challenge and kept my beliefs and values in tact.
>
> The experience of attending college and university was enlightening in many ways. In college I learned about myself and how I fitted into the field of social work. In university I learned to "play the game" in order to succeed. The two experiences did not quite connect with each other. The college program could have prepared me better for the requirements of a university BSW program. I discovered I was missing critical preparatory courses such as statistics and research methodology which would have helped enormously. In university, many courses emphasized professional development, but they gave no consideration to personal development. (p. 199)

Brown (1992), in reviewing social work education for Aboriginal communities, has also noted the assimilationist potential of such training and has suggested that some change was needed in the way such education is delivered, including the recognition and accommodation of Aboriginal perspectives.

As already mentioned, at the outset of this research, I was concerned that, perhaps unintentionally, exposure to a two year community college Diploma in Social Work program could have accelerated the process of assimilation for some, if not all, of the study participants. This could have occurred when an Aboriginal knowledge base and shared meaning were not recognised or respected either in the materials presented and discussed in the classroom or in the textbooks used. These were not merely theoretical concerns, since I had observed that the curricula for these social work courses was usually developed by non-Native instructors with minimal input from students, and delivered to students who themselves had already experienced varying degrees of assimilation, and who might therefore not be as critical of the cultural bias of the courses as they otherwise would have been. The subsequent comments of the participants did much to allay my fears.

One theme to emerge from the study was that of the emotional "baggage" that many of the participants brought to the program, often related to self-esteem issues, and sometimes reflecting a cultural ambivalence. Some of these students had had direct exposure to the Residential Schools and had been harmed by the experience, while others had been fortunate not to have attended them, although they may have subsequently experienced hurt from someone who had.

From the outset of this social work program, a personal growth course had been offered to all the participants, many of whom had experienced some form of abuse in the past, to help them in their personal healing process.

Some of the participants had minimal social supports when they entered the program, and had to frequently contend with multiple family obligations while they were in it. Several of the participants too, had had to give up secure and relatively well-paid positions to enter the program, while others had resented being pressured by their bands, either directly or indirectly, to return to school.

While in the program several of the students had to struggle with their own feelings of guilt over abandoning other members of their family while doing something for themselves. For some, those feelings were intensified when other family members felt threatened by the new education the participants were getting and began to react. Stress levels were frequently high for these adult learners as they continued to respond to family pressures while struggling with poverty and the intellectual and emotional rigors of the courses they were taking.

For the majority of the participants however, these struggles appear to have been worth it. Several of them indicated that their success in college had inspired other people in their families and communities to contemplate returning to school. Some participants also reported that their relationships with other members of their families had actually improved while they had been in the program.

Other positive consequences of the program included improved friendships, greater self-assurance and assertiveness skills, increased tolerance of others, and an enhanced sense of Native identity.

While it is clear that a great deal of personal growth did occur for most of the participants while they were in the Social Work Program, the degree to which those improvements will translate into being a more effective, liberated and emancipatory social worker in the future is difficult to assess without conducting a longtitudinal study. From the comments made by these graduates, it would seem that many felt personally more powerful at the end of the program, and often in social work the assumption is made that personal empowerment is a necessary precondition for empowering others. Several studies in education have also begun to explore issues related to Native identity, self-esteem, and the realities of post-secondary education for Aboriginal people, and some similar themes have begun to emerge.

Read (1983), for instance, has commented on the personal growth element that often accompanies the learning Native women are sometimes exposed to, and observed in one project that exposure to new ideas in a collaborative and supportive learning environment can teach people to value themselves more highly and become more tolerant of others. This learning can be related to an enhanced self-esteem, and an increased valuing of education that in turn, can sometimes lead to greater support for the learner's own children's learning. Certainly this last observation was commented upon by several of the respondents in this study who reported discussing their schoolwork with their spouses and other family members and working on their assignments while their children sat nearby completing their own homework. Even so, not all the participants had families who were consistently supportive of their efforts to gain an education, and there were suggestions by several of the participants during the interviews that they had become more assertive in dealing with family members since returning to school.

Henry (1989) has explored the sources of self-esteem amongst a group of Native adults and observed that positive self-esteem was related to receiving supportive feedback from immediate and extended family and from teachers. Marchand (1990) has suggested that the formation of self-identity is a complex process and for some Native people their childhood experiences have severely interfered with that process. She has further pointed out that some studies have concluded that clients prefer to receive counselling from a professional from the same cultural background. Marchand's recommendation is that training programs for counsellors should help students examine their own values and beliefs as well as those of Native people in general, and they should promote increased self-awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. These suggestions are consistent with the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program's emphasis on personal growth and cultural relevance. Diaz (1993), came to a similar conclusion to Marchand and suggested that to be an effective Native counsellor an Aboriginal person should have a strong sense of his/her own culture and the ability to help people identify their uniqueness.

Voyageur (1993), has pointed out the perceived benefits for Native students of being in a preliminary transitional program at university as a prelude to more vigorous study, and this observation lends support to the practice in all Grant MacEwan Community College Social Work Program's off-campus courses for Native people to be preceded by a personal awareness course. Such courses frequently serve the dual function of beginning the process of self-reflection and building peer support for students, while at the same time selecting out applicants who might not be suited or ready for the program.

Nesdoly (1993), in her consideration of an upgrading program for Native women, has suggested that for some students the personal growth opportunities that take place incidentally to the academic component may in fact be more highly valued than the credential that may eventually be awarded. McLaughlin (1985) made a similar point about evaluating the success of college programs for Native women, and like Nesdoly, has argued that good learning can occur even when drop-out rates are high.

From some of these studies, as well as from this particular research project, it would seem that Native people returning to school after a period of absence place a high value on the personal growth opportunities that such attendance provides, and that the emotional climate created within the classroom is crucial to this process. This is consistent with the comments made by other adult educators who have suggested that a correlation exists between the affective and cognitive domains for students, and that both must be equally addressed if the goal is to create some form of "emancipatory" learning.

Critical elements in the development of a state of emotional readiness for "liberating" learning to take place, particularly for the graduates who participated in this research, appeared to be the degree of mentoring and general reassurance and support available from the on-site program coordinator, from instructors, and from peers.

Hansman-Ferguson and Garofolo (1995), have made similar observations concerning women pursuing Doctoral studies at university, where they noted that many such students sought out female mentors to sustain them through their studies, principally because they wanted a female role model, a supportive friendship, or some form of affirmation. An insight into the role of a coordinator in a social work program similar to the one completed by the respondents in this study is presented in an interview with a former coordinator of the social work program at Blue Quills First Nations College (Hannis,1993), where the coordinator had a clear role as teacher, counsellor, mentor, tutor, and friend. Nesdoly (1993), has noted that nurturing and academic achievement are not necessarily mutually exclusive goals for adult educators, and that when planning learning opportunities educators should realise that "they are not just educating women with facts for college, but with concepts for life."

The findings of this research into the experiences of social work graduates from a community college are, to some extent, substantiated by other studies. There does seem to be an important relationship between adult learning, self-awareness, and the levels of personal support that are available to students, and the degree of validation that is available from instructors, from peers, and from family and community members. An interesting complementary study to this one might be to look at the reasons why some Native adult learners fail to complete their programs, and in particular, if such drop-outs are caused by a lack of supportive relationships both within and outside the classroom.

In reviewing the findings of this study, it is clear that many of the graduates experienced healthy personal transformations while in the program. Not only did they feel better about themselves as competent human beings and helping professionals, but also many of them had a stronger sense of identification with Native culture after completing the program than they had had at the outset. The most positive possible outcome is that these changes will have a beneficial impact upon future clients as well as upon the participants' own communities. Not only will these new social workers serve as positive role models for other Native people, but also their higher self-esteem and willingness to self-disclose may in turn act as mechanisms to facilitate clients identifying and expressing their own issues, as a preliminary step to their own healing.

Unfortunately, an improved capacity to help others may not necessarily lead to significant social change at the societal level. Indeed, several writers have suggested that formidable barriers exist to prevent even the most competent and highly motivated social worker from bringing about significant structural change at the community level. For instance, even if the graduates of this program wanted to bring about fundamental change, real social change might be difficult for them to achieve while employed within inherently conservative bureaucratised structures, both on the reserve and within non-Native settings (Galper, 1975; Zastrow, 1981). Social workers, like teachers and other professionals, have been accused of perpetuating the "status quo" by helping clients adapt to and passively accept the existing unjust power structures in society, rather than organising the disadvantaged for significant social action (Alinsky,1971, Galper,1975). Being members of a profession that, like other professional groups, is conservative and self-serving (Illich, 1977) also places limits on the capacity of social workers to engage in direct social action.

Adult educators also experience, and in turn, can impose, constraints that restrict the degree of "emancipatory learning" that is possible in the classroom. In the case of these study participants, they had virtually no choice in selecting the courses they would take, or the instructors who would teach them. Their input into curriculum planning was minimal, and sanctions were applied against those students who missed too many classes or were late with assignments. This high degree of control over the program by non-Native, urban residents, was justified in the name of preserving academic standards and maintaining some accountability for public funds. This situation was not unique to the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program, and has been observed elsewhere. For example, in describing the undergraduate program operated by the University of Manitoba in the northern Canadian community of Thompson, deMontigny (1992) noted that while the program had originally been set up as a means of redressing colonialism, the way that it operated meant that it functioned as just another apparatus of colonial power. According to deMontigny, this situation was created because of the hierarchical structure that had been set up which, in effect, devalued northern ways of knowing and led to a dependent relationship being established between two educational institutions, with special student regulating policies being implemented that were reminisent of the old Residential Schools, and with all the important decisions about curriculum, knowledge, values, skills, and organisation being made in Winnipeg.

While the prospects for the graduates of the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program creating real structural change should not be exaggerated, it does seem reasonable to assume that the personal change that occurred for them while in the social work program was "emancipatory," and that some of these personally empowering experiences could have a "ripple-effect" throughout Native communities. Thus, over time, it could be argued that the growing numbers of graduates from similar programs could lead to more structural reform at the "macro" level.

There is no question that for the vast majority of respondents, their participation in this Social Work Diploma program was a personally empowering experience. Many spoke highly of the change that had occurred for them while they had been in the program, and several of these former high school drop-outs had clearly developed the self-confidence to seriously contemplate continuing on to university. Given the oppressive potential of postsecondary institutions, the question arises of why the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program was so successful in graduating so many apparently self-confident Aboriginal social workers?

In part the answer to this question lies in a consideration of Mezirow's (1978,1990, 1991,1994) work on Transformative Learning Theory, and an apparent compatibility between "liberating" adult education theories and the philosophy of social work that most of these non-Native instructors embraced.

While most of the instructors teaching on this social work program would have had only an incomplete sense of Mezirow's work, and to a lesser extent, the ideas of Paulo Freire, the notion of helping individuals transform themselves and society is a primary goal for many employed in this helping profession.

Essentially, Mezirow has suggested that transformative learning involves a shift in perspective arising from the development of new insights, beginning with what he has called a "disorienting dilemma," defined as an acute internal/external personal crisis, leading to a period of critical reflection. Mezirow's (1991) contention that

> the essence of adult education is to help learners construe experience in a way that allows them to understand more clearly the reasons for their problems and the action options open to them so that they can improve the quality of their decision-making (p.203),

is in fact, a description of the philosophy of social work that many of the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program instructors would strongly endorse.

Several of the participants in this study reported that a process of critical reflection had already begun before entering the program, and that it had been allowed to continue while they were in it. Lesley, for example, had been forced to confront his alcoholism and had begun to find his Native roots while he was in recovery at an Aboriginal addictions treatment centre, and this early stage of changed meaning perspective had begun even before he had thought about becoming a social worker. Similar spiritual journeys had also been underway for Wanda, Tammy, and Margaret for a period of time before they entered the program.

In selecting the participants for this study I deliberately chose those people who I thought had been the most motivated to succeed at their studies, and it may also have been that these graduates were the ones who had been most likely transformed by their educational experience. Thus, to some extent it was a biased sample. These were the students who had come to my class prepared and usually on time, who had obviously done the assigned reading, who participated actively in class discussions, who appeared to feel comfortable with some degree of self-disclosure, and who, for the most part, turned their assignments in on time. In total the participants in this study consisted of approximately two-thirds of those who graduated from the program.

Mezirow's notion of Transformative Learning suggests that a change in meaning perspective is also accompanied by an increase in self-confidence, (something that most of these respondents reported), and the instigation of an action related to this new perspective (something that many of the respondents indicated they had begun to do, particularly in their relationships with family members and friends).

There are some similarities between Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory and Brookfield's (1990) ideas on critical thinking. Brookfield (1990) has referred to the emotional climate that exists within a classroom of adult learners, where assumptions, values, and beliefs are being rendered explicit and questioned. When people who have been silenced first begin to find their voice, they often express themselves with great passion and sometimes anger, after which they can sometimes feel guilty and vulnerable.

Massing (1991) addressed this issue in her research, and observed that the experience of speaking up for many women can be extremely rewarding, but also entails a fair degree of risk.

CONCLUSION

While my own bias is that a liberating education of the type offered to the participants in this study is beneficial to both the students and the communities they represent, this assumption could be challenged. Some of the graduates of this program might not find it easy to adapt to life on the reserve in the future once they have begun to critically reflect upon the world around them. Rowlands (1995), for instance, has suggested that "educated" Natives are like displaced pieces of a jigsaw puzzle who sometimes feel that they have to tread carefully for some time after their return to their communities before they can be accepted.

Other Native students I have worked with in the past have caused political upsets back on their reserves as they have begun to break through what one student succinctly described as the "crap layer." One of the participants in this study, Margaret, suggested that there is sometimes some testing out that goes on when educated Aboriginals return to the reserve, to see if they have remained true to their culture, or if they have become Apples. She also mentioned that on some cash-strapped reserves, the preference is to hire untrained social workers because they are cheaper. Maybe too, they are also more compliant and less critical of their surroundings.

Barrette (1995) attempted to trace the progress of Native people from a reserve who had been exposed to a post-secondary educational experience and noted that while some did remain on the reserve after graduation, limited employment opportunities forced others to move away. Of those who remained, tensions sometimes emerged as power structures and traditional ways of doing things began to be challenged.

Some of the participants in this study were already employed as social workers on their reserves before they entered the YTC/GMCC Social Work Program, and returned to those jobs after graduation. It is not known at this stage if they are more effective in their jobs now than they were before they obtained their social work credential, but graduates of a similar program in another part of the province (Hannis,1993) were reported to perceive themselves as being more effective after completing the program than before.

This research began with the question: Does participation in a two-year social work program delivered by a non-Native post-secondary educational institution amount to assimilation "through the back door?" Based on the findings of this research the answer is: "Not necessarily." Despite the limitations of the curriculum and a mostly non-Native faculty, it is clear that considerable personal transformation took place for most of the participants in this study and that they graduated with a stronger sense of themselves as Native people. Their appreciation for the role of social workers had been broadened while in the program, although some of them thought that they would need to further their studies at university in order to be effective as agents of social change.

Since their graduation, some of these participants have either already entered a university, or are in the process of doing so. Only time will tell if their sense of personal empowerment and committment will be enhanced by having a university degree. I hope it is, and that the graduates of this Social Work Program will distinguish themselves in the future as effective social workers and celebrated Native activists.

EPILOGUE

Despite some initial misgivings about the nature of formal education in general, and this program in particular, it does seem that the participants in this study experienced some emancipatory effect while they were learning how to become social workers. For this the educational institutions involved should be congratulated. However, there is no room for complacency.

When contemplating similar programs in the future, it would be essential that as many Aboriginal people as possible be involved in developing and implementing curricula, and that thought be given to how instructors themselves could be sensitised to their own and their students' cultural issues before entering the classroom.

In particular, some discussion should take place concerning the issue of cultural relevance, and how it can be addressed across the whole curriculum, rather than merely being confined to one or two specific modules. At the same time the question of how best individual students and their communities can be empowered by their educational experience would need to be addressed with vigor, honesty and committment.

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APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to help me with my research. The purpose of this research is to explore ways in which recent GMCC/YTC social work graduates have changed over the past two years.

This research will be invaluable to the M.Ed. thesis I am currently working on at the University of Alberta.

The University of Alberta requires that all graduates undertaking research take into account certain ethical concerns and safeguards, for the benefit of all participants. Therefore, as a researcher, I am committed to ensuring the following rights for participants in this research:

1) The right to be fully informed of the purpose of the study.
2) The right to opt out of the study at any time, without negative consequence.
3) The right to expect confidentiality and anonymity to be respected at all times.
4) The right to expect that the study will not be used in any way to threaten or damage either the participants or any third party.
5) The right not to be deceived about any aspect of the study.
6) The right not to be coerced into participating in the study.
7) The right to see a copy of the final thesis document upon request, and to receive an executive summary of the key findings of the research.

Your involvement in this research is entirely voluntary, and no inducements, financial or otherwise will be offered to participants. Should you require any further information on the project, please call me at home on 436-3112. If you agree to these conditions, could you please sign and return the attached Informed Consent Form to me?

Once again, thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

David Hannis.

April 1994.

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE PILOT INTERVIEW

1. How would you describe your experiences in the Social Work Program?
2. What was your sense of what a social worker did when you entered the program?
3. Were your experiences in this program different from your previous educational experiences?
4. What were your expectations when you came into the Social Work Program?
5. What makes a good, strong social worker?
6. How do you see social work now?
7. Do you think that the people who went with you through the program are still able to keep a client focus?
8. Are you doing the kind of social work now that you want to do?
9. What do you think the biggest challenge facing Aboriginal social workers is today?
10. Do you think your identity as a Native person was enhanced while you were in the social work program?
11. Do you think it makes a difference for a Native person to have a Native rather than non-Native instructor?
12. How do you see yourself personally meeting the challenges facing Native people in the next few years?

APPENDIX 3: QUESTIONS TO THE FOCUS GROUP AND PARTICIPANTS

a. As an individual, do you think you have changed much over the last two years?

b. Can you think of any recent decisions you have made which you handled differently than you would have done two years ago?

c. What are your major concerns about the society we live in today?

d. How do you see yourself addressing those concerns at both a personal and professional level?

e. Do you think you would have given these same answers if you had been asked them two years ago?

f. Is there anything else you would like to say?

APPENDIX 4: QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED TO THE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS DURING THE SECOND INTERVIEW

1. Were there any barriers/difficulties you had to overcome before you could go to the YTC program?
2. Have your ideas of what a social worker does changed over the last two years?
3. Have family/friends or you yourself noticed any changes in you over the last two years?
4. Has your sense of yourself as a Native person changed over the past two years?
5. In what ways do you think the courses you took on the YTC Social Work Program were relevant or not relevant?
6. What were the characteristics of the instructors who inspired or didn't inspire you?
7. If you were to design a program to train Native social workers, what would it look like?
8. In what ways do you think you will be able to help Native people in the future?
9. What are your plans now that you have finished the YTC program?
10. Where do you see yourself working in five years time?
11. Do you have any other comments or observations?

APPENDIX 5: PERSONAL ESSAY QUESTIONS

The purpose of this research is to examine the changes you feel have taken place for you over the past two years, both personally and professionally. The following questions will help me know something about your early life, and how you see yourself now. Please go into as much depth as you feel you are able.

a) Could you write something about what life was like for you when you were growing up, including your family, school, and community experiences?

b) How do you feel about yourself now, as a person, and as a social worker?

c) Have your family and/or friends noticed any changes in you over the past two years?

David Hannis

April 1994.

David Hannis: M.Ed. Thesis Research

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, (please print name): ______________________ have read the attached informed consent form, and understand my rights as a participant in this research, as explained in the attached document, and to me personally by David Hannis.

Signed: ______________________

Date: ______________________

ADDRESS: ______________________

______________________ POSTALCODE: __________

TELEPHONE NUMBER: ______________________